PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

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I turned my eyes downward. Horror unspeakable! There, clinging with one hand to the projecting end of the spur, hung the form of Augustus Welby.

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"I."

A STORY OF STRANGE ADVENTURE.

By Richard R. Montgomery.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

Although I have put my name beneath the title of this story, I want it to be distinctly understood that I did not write it.

To fancy so plain, so every-day an individual as myself taking active part in such strange adventure, seems ridiculous —nay, absurd.

The story is precisely what it purports to be—no more, no less.

I have given it to the reader in substance just as I received it in the professor's manuscript, making only such slight changes in grammar and punctuation as were absolutely necessary to fit it for the press.

Of course the first question which will be asked upon reading this marvelous narration will be the all-important one—is it true?

I answer, yes, it is true.

Concerning this manuscript, I can only say that I firmly believe it, every word.

So much for the satisfaction of inquisitive persons and doubters.

Let me now tell how I came to get possession of the manuscript without further delay.

It is not generally known that I am something of a doctor.

I graduated in due course, and in the fall of 18— was practicing my profession in West 2— Street, in the city of New York.

The house upon which I had affixed my modest shingle was at the end of a row of twelve—not the corner house, but the one which adjoined the garden inclosed with the high, brick wall.

Now, as the great mansion which stood in the midst of this garden behind the red brick wall was a mystery, I was, I must confess, somewhat excited upon receiving a call to attend a patient there one chilly evening in October, at something like a quarter of twelve.

"The man-with-his-head-in-a-bag wants to see you, sir!" Pete, my colored boy, had said, pronouncing the words as though they constituted the name of the person who, to have such a cognomen, might easily have been mistaken for some Indian chief.

But the man-with-his-head-in-a-bag was only my neighbor's servant.

For what reason no one in the neighborhood could ever imagine, this person invariably appeared in public with the right side of his face and head concealed beneath a black silk bag, so constructed as to take in the nose, but to leave the mouth free.

Thus no one ever saw but one side of him, and strangely enough his master, whom he daily drove out in a close carriage, was fixed up about the head in much the same way.

Whatever the difficulty was it seemed to have affected the master—whose name none could learn—upon the left side of the face, just as it had the servant on the right.

From my windows I had often seen him—the master—crossing the sidewalk between the iron gate and the carriage.

The left side of his face and head were covered in the

same sort of fashion, only that in his case the nose was visible, the eye, cheek, ear and neck being concealed.

It also seemed to me as though the gentleman was partially paralyzed on one side—the left. His arm stood away from his side, with the hand slightly raised as though making, or about to make a gesture, and in this position he always carried it perfectly rigid as though it had been suddenly frozen so, and had never thawed out again.

Now this was the mystery of the house in the garden.

Of course, I hurried Pete off with instructions to send the man-with-his-head-in-a-bag in to me at once.

He did so.

The man stood before my desk a moment later—a respectable-looking Irishman with the right side of his face concealed behind that strange mask of silk, as I have said.

"You are the doctor?"

"I am," I replied.

"Professor Inchbald is sick; he wants to see you at once—will you come?"

Professor Inchbald!

"Come," thought I; "we have learned the name of this recluse at all events, if this visit results in nothing more."

Five minutes later the servant had just thrown open the door of the mysterious house in the garden and motioned me in.

"The masther is in the library, sir," he said, respectfully. "He slapes there to be near his books. Come this way, if you plaze."

He threw open a door on the right and ushered me into the most magnificently furnished parlor I had ever seen.

Don't ask me to describe it, for I can't. All I shall say is that it seemed to me as I trod the soft folds of the Persian carpet, glancing about me by the dim light thrown from the room beyond, as if I had suddenly dropped into the palace of some Oriental monarch or some marvelous museum filled with royal treasures from the far-distant East.

Gold and silver glittered on every side; jewels of priceless worth, if they were real—and even then I thought so—caught the feeble light and flashed it back upon me from table and cabinet as I passed.

But through all this the man hurried me quickly, and, reaching the back room, left me, with no more introduction than a simple, "Here's the doctor, sir," standing before a grave, middle-aged gentleman, seated in a reclining chair, who was breathing hard and was, as I could see at a glance, suffering from a severe attack of asthma.

The room was simply a library.

Bookshelves rose in tiers on every hand, loaded with volumes from ceiling to floor.

There was also an open grate fire which looked cozy and comfortable, plenty of substantial furniture, but to my surprise no sign of a bed.

"He sleeps in his chair," I thought instantly, and then further opportunity for reflection was banished by the greeting I received.

"Doctor, I am glad to see you, for I am suffering. I have reached a point where I must have medical treatment, and you have been recommended to me. My name is Inchbald. Examine me if you please, and let me know the chances of my strangling before morning."

Just how I replied I can't recall at this moment, but I remember that my mind was not in what I said.

To my surprise I saw that Professor Inchbald's face was without its usual covering; that his chair was provided with a singular contrivance on the left side, serving as a rest for his arm, which was held in the same peculiar position I had so often observed before.

As he sat there in the soft light of a student-lamp which burned upon a table drawn up beside him and covered with open books and papers, the face looked just as the face of any man should look; but when, a moment later, he deliberately took my hand and laid it upon that face I could not refrain from a cry of amazement for which I was ashamed the instant it had escaped my lips.

Reader, the left side of this man's face was as hard and as cold as stone!

So was his neck, so was his left arm.

"I want you to help me off with my coat," he said, quietly, at the same time rising with difficulty. "You must see into my condition, it is necessary. First of all examine my arm."

I obeyed in silence.

In so doing my hand came in contact with his own.

It was cold! It was as hard as flint!

The coat-sleeve formed the only covering of the arm.

There it was revealed before my eyes, white and rigid.

It was an arm of stone!

The same was true of the left cheek, the ear, the eye, part of the beard and hair.

As I passed my hand over this man's face at his request I could scarce persuade myself that it was not all a dream.

The right side of that face was of flesh and blood, the left presented a smooth, whitish appearance, more closely resembling alabaster than anything else.

Like the arm it had turned to stone.

"Well," said my patient, with a peculiar smile as I drew wonderingly away, "what do you think of me?"

"I have no words to express my thoughts," I replied.

"You never heard of a man partially petrified?"

"Never. Such a thing is unknown to medical science."

"About my asthma—am I in any danger?"

I examined my strange patient critically, and was obliged to tell him that he was in great danger.

"Can you remain with me through the night, doctor?"

"I can."

"Then do so. I shall try to sleep here in this chair, as has long been my custom. I can't lie in a bed, you see, for fear of breaking off my arm. While I sleep I wish you to read this manuscript which I have prepared for publication. You see, I have determined to make my strange case known, and hearing that you were something of a literary character, I have decided to do so through you, if after reading you deem my adventures of sufficient interest. Make yourself comfortable in yonder easy-chair. After you have read I will further explain."

He now took from a drawer in the table a bulky, closely written manuscript and placed it in my outstretched hand.

Then after administering to him the usual remedies for the complaint under which he labored, I withdrew to the easy-chair, wheeled the table beside it, and by the soft light of the student-lamp read the marvelous tale which I submit herewith.

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGE LEGACY.

My name is Theophilus Inchbald.

In the year 18— I was a poor teacher of languages, residing in the city of New York.

It don't matter about the precise date. It is enough to state that it was upon a certain winter's night—a night marked by one of the worst snow storms I ever remember—that Augustus Welby, a former pupil of mine in the Arabic language, burst into my room, half frozen and with garments white with snow.

I had not seen Augustus Welby for months.

He had mastered Arabic at the age of twenty, and now, at twenty-one, I had supposed him ready to assume the cares of business—in fact, never expected to see much of him again.

He was the handsomest fellow I ever knew, with dark, curling hair, regular features, a perfect form, and a sprightliness of manner which every one loved.

That was why I was so much astonished to see him so grave and distracted now, and to notice lines of perplexity about his mouth, which I had never observed before.

"Professor," he said, removing his hat and flinging himself into a chair, "I want to talk to you. My mind is full of a most singular thing, and I want to let it out."

"If you can't confide in me, my boy, who can you confide in?" was my reply. "Out with it. If there is anything that I can do for you, you know it is only necessary to say the word."

For a moment or two he remained in silence.

"You knew my mother was dead?" he broke out at last.

"Yes, I had heard of it. You have my full sympathy."

"Of course, I know it. But it is not that."

"You are rich now?"

"Yes, yes; but it is not that, either. See here, professor, you are better at the Arabic than I am, I want you to read what is written here."

As he spoke my former pupil thrust his hand beneath his coat and drew forth a small box or casket of black ebony, which I instantly recognized as an object of great age.

This he opened and took from it a tablet of ivory, all covered with Arabic letters written in gold.

There was also another similar tablet in the box as I could see.

"Now read and tell me what you think of it all," he said.

I obeyed, and this is what I read aloud:

"I, Cyprian, a bishop of the church of Christ, at Carthage, in the year of our blessed Lord, 217, being in deadly fear at the hands of the Roman governor, did take the copy of the Holy Scriptures made in the days of Ptolemy, King of Egypt, to the city of the queen, who is never seen, where men are stones and stones are men and people stand on the earth for ten thousand years, and there did lay it at the feet of the queen, who is never seen, who will preserve it for generations to come.

"I did go by ship to the gulf Sidra, and landed by the hill whereon stands the tower. Thence by way of the land which has no bottom, by way of the level mountain, which the wise men of Egypt believed to be the end of the earth. Thence by way of the bottomless pit and the sea without water. Then in the city of Tedla laid I the priceless treasure at the feet of the queen who is never seen, and I charge those who come after me, and into whose hands this writing shall fall, to go and fetch it and give it to the world once more."

"Well, what do you think of it?" demanded Augustus Welby, excitedly, when I laid the tablet down at last.

"I don't know what to think of it," I replied. "Familiar as I am with the Arabic language, I know that this communication must have been written centuries ago."

"And so it was. Did you ever hear of this Cyprian?"

"Certainly. He was one of the early Christian fathers. He dwelt at Carthage, in Northern Africa, and was burned at the stake in the year 220, for his adherence to the Christian religion. He is the Saint Cyprian of the Catholic Church, but by no possibility could he have ever written this, and after all these centuries the tablet fall into your hands."

"Why not?"

"Think of the lapse of time."

"I do think of it. Read this."

He placed in my hand a written paper, which I proceeded to read aloud.

It was as follows:

"To My Dear Son—Knowing that death is near, I must obey the commands of your father and place in your possession the ebony casket. Much against my will I must also convey to you your father's last wishes given to me on the eve of his departure for Africa. It is, my son, that you read the tablet within the casket and follow its directions, and, if it is to be permitted, be the means of restoring the first copy ever taken of the Holp Scriptures to the world if he should fail.

"Such is the command of your father; but oh, my son, pause before you act. Through generations and generations this precious yet accursed relic has been handed down in the Welby family, and lives innumerable have been sacrificed in the endeavor to carry out its commands. You know that your father died in Africa—it was this which sent him there. His father—his father's grandfather, and still further back others have met with a similar fate. Still I have executed my promise. I have had you instructed in the Arabic language, and at my death I communicate this fatal secret to you in accordance with your father's wish. Sarah Welby.

"New York, Jan. 12, 18—."

Inclosed in this paper was another, signed by Augustus Welby's father, laying upon him the most positive commands to undertake the search for the relic, should his own efforts fail.

The storm was beating furiously against the windows as I laid this last paper aside.

Never shall I forget the look of strange determination which met me as I turned to glance at my pupil's face.

It impressed me so strongly that I forgot entirely the second ivory tablet which still remained in the casket.

"Is it true that your father died in Africa?" I wonderingly exclaimed.

"It is. He went to Africa when I was a boy, and was never heard of again."

"And your grandfather and your great-great-grandfather, as the paper says?"

"Also true. I have been looking into our family history since this thing came into my hands. There are more of these documents, professor, which I haven't shown you yet, though later on I will do so. They go to prove that this relic came into the possession of the Welbys in the days of the first Crusade. It has kept them mad ever since. As my mother's letter says, it has cost many of them their lives."

"But," said I, "the tablet is an unquestionable fabrication, though, no doubt, an old one. Besides, the inscription is nothing but rubbish.

"How can men be stones, and stones men?

"How can people 'stand on the earth ten thousand years'?

"Think of it yourself, my boy. As for all the rest, I say nothing. Those mystical words about the sea without water, the bottomless pit and the level mountain are too absurd even to talk about. Besides, the Ptolemaic translation of the Holy Scriptures is something of which I never heard and don't believe in."

"You don't!" cried Augustus Welby. "Then here you have it in history. Oh, I've looked the matter up, professor. Here is Spindler's History of the Bible, an undoubted authority. Listen to what it says."

He pulled a book from out of the pocket of his overcoat and read as follows:

"Ptolemy Philadelphus, King of Egypt, in the third century before Christ, desiring to make a complete collection of all the books in the world, sent messengers to every nation and clime. Having heard that the Jews possessed certain sacred writings in their temple at Jerusalem, he naturally desired a copy for his library.

"At that time there was but this one copy of the Old Testament in existence, and the Jews guarded it with so much jealousy that no one save their high priest was permitted to see it.

"Naturally they at first refused the request of the Egyptian king, and were only induced to consent finally upon the payment of a sum of money equal to $600,000, and the liberation of 120,000 Jewish slaves held captive in Egypt.

"The priests then caused copies to be made of all the sacred writings. These copies were made in the most magnificent style, and were splendidly illuminated with letters of gold.

"For several centuries the copies remained in the great library at Alexandria, in Egypt; but upon the conquest of that country by the Romans, in the days of Cleopatra, they were stolen and taken to Rome.

"It is known to be a fact that the copies were in the possession of St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, in the year 200. When the Romans burnt the bishop, search was made for the sacred writing, but in vain.

"By some means they had been spirited away, and their fate has been a mystery from that day to this."

Augustus Welby closed the book and looked at me with the same strange expression on his face again.

"Professor, I can't help it, but I'm going out to Africa to seek for those books," was what he said.

"You are mad!" I cried. "The country back of the Gulf of Sidra is nothing but a desert, filled with wild, lawless tribes of wandering Arabs. See here, on this map there is no such place as Tedla laid down."

"I know it."

"Think of the risk."

"I don't care for the risk. There is something urging me on."

"Think of your father, of your grandfather, and all who lost their lives in this mad quest before them!"

"I think of everything. Is it not my father's request? Besides, I tell you again there is something urging me on."

"But the tablet is a forgery—it must be a forgery. Again I say, St. Cyprian, whose writings are preserved and in every library, could never have been guilty of such nonsense as this."

"If St. Cyprian's writings have been preserved why not this tablet?"

"Pshaw! that is a different thing."

"I don't see it so. I repeat once more, something is urging me on."

"What is it?" I asked, desperately, anxious to prevent this crazy undertaking if it lay in my power to do so."

"It is this," he replied, drawing from the casket the second ivory tablet and laying it upon the table before me. "Look into those eyes, professor; gaze upon that face and then tell me not to go!"

There was a woman's face painted upon the tablet, the most marvelously beautiful face it had ever been my fortune to behold.

I am not going to attempt its description, for it is beyond my powers. All I know is that for many moments I could not remove my eyes from it, nor did I do so until Augustus Welby spoke again.

"Read the inscription on the back, professor."

I turned the tablet over.

The inscription was in Arabic and read thus:

"The Queen That is Never Seen."

"Go!" cried Augustus. "I would go to the ends of the earth to gaze but for a single instant upon the original of that face. Look at her! She seems to call me. Oh, yes, professor, I am going to Africa. I am going to take up this

search for those sacred books. I am going to learn my father's fate!"

"You are mad, boy, mad!" I cried, thrusting the tablets back into the casket. "Throw this thing into the fire lest it prove a curse to you. Even if this woman once lived, what can she be to you after these many hundred years?"

"I am going," he repeated, solemnly; "and what is more, you, my best of friends, are going with me."

"I!"

Well do I remember the expression of scornful incredulity I threw into that single word.

I go to Africa on such a crazy mission?

I risk my life among deserts, wild Arabs and a thousand other dangers as well?

Nevertheless, reader, I went.

CHAPTER III.

THE BOTTOMLESS PIT.

"Hurry on there, you lazy fellow! Hurry on, or you'll be left behind! Don't you see that the sun is setting? Unless we can reach some place where water is to be had before night overtakes us, our lives won't be worth a rush by the dawning of another day."

"Sure an' it's clane beat out I am wid the walkin', Misther Welby. Bad luck to this haythen country, that ever the last daycindint of O'Gilligan the O'Gilligan should come to a pass like this!"

And a stout, brawny Irish lad, loaded down with knapsack, gun and camp paraphernalia came hurrying toward the speaker across the sandy plain.

The speaker was none other than my former pupil, Augustus Welby, and I, your humble servant, lay stretched upon the burning sands of an African desert, waiting for our servant to come up.

It was in the month of June, 18—, the summer following the visit of Augustus Welby to my rooms on the night of the storm.

How happened it that I was here, do I hear the reader of these pages ask?

Truly that is a question hard to answer.

I was younger then, and more ambitious than I now am.

My boy, Gus, as I loved to call him, persuaded me, and so I came.

Not that I believed in the truth of the statement upon the tablet.

Although Gus showed me papers and documents which amply proved the possession of the casket by the Welby family for at least five hundred years, I remained as incredulous as ever.

He was bent upon the hazardous mission, and I joined him because I could not refuse.

The fact is, I had become so deeply attached to the lad that I could not let him go alone.

We went by steamer to Alexandria in Egypt, and well supplied with every essential for our journey, took a little sailing craft down to the Gulf of Sidra on the coast of Barca, and landing at a place called Mahla, started inland with a single Arab, who professed to have traveled through the country as far as the oasis of Fezzan, for our guide.

Now, at Mahla two very singular discoveries were made.

First, we found that on a high bluff overlooking the harbor was an ancient tower, built nobody knew by whom or how.

It was just such a tower as was described on the ivory tablet.

There was no denying it.

Still I was not convinced.

The second discovery was still more remarkable.

It was that the mysterious city of Tedla, ruled over by a beautiful woman who was never seen, was a legend in every one's mouth at Mahla.

The governor of the town, an intelligent Tripolitan, to whom we bore a letter from the Sultan of Turkey, assured us that it was a fact that such a city existed, and that rumor had it that people in that city never died.

"Of course, I don't believe it," he had said. "The Arabs are all such liars! Still there is a city called Tedla, and it is ruled over by a woman, and always has been, although you won't find it laid down on the maps."

The Governor of Mahla informed us further that Tedla was some two hundred miles across the desert in a beautiful and fertile valley at the foot of the Maraige Mountains, but he warned us that it was "filled with unbelieving dogs," infidels—that is not Mohammedans, with a dozen wives—who would never suffer us to enter it alive.

Some claimed that the city was in ruins and not now inhabited.

Others claimed that it was in this locality, or in that.

None claimed to have been there, as it was closely guarded by the lawless tribes who surrounded it.

All united in saying that we could never reach it—that to try would be but a willful sacrifice of life.

The fact was, the interior of Barca is as wholly unknown as Ethiopia itself.

Still Gus was resolved upon advancing, and as the testimony of the governor was thus confirmed by a cloud of witnesses, I could really find no good ground for objection.

As for the danger, we knew all that before we started. It was too late now to offer it as an excuse.

Accompanied by Terrence O'Gilligan, an Irish youth who had seen service in the Welby family, and one, Ismail, our Arab guide, we set out for the interior, forthwith.

The evening of which I write was that of our tenth day out.

On the third night Ismail had stolen such of our belongings as he could carry and decamped, leaving Gus, Terrence O'Gilligan and myself in the desert alone.

For the remaining days we had traveled on and on across that pathless waste of sand without encountering a living soul.

Now it was night.

We were footsore and weary, and our water having become exhausted, were in a fair way to perish.

Long since Gus had signified his willingness to return, and we thought we were doing so.

Unfortunately our compass had been one of the articles stolen by our rascally guide, and here we were lost in the desert like a ship without a rudder in the midst of an unknown sea.

"Gus," said I, wearily, as Terrence came hobbling up to us, "it is useless; I can go no further. As well die in one place as another; best let me die here."

"Nonsense, profess!" he exclaimed, with something of his old sprightly way. "Things are bad enough, I must admit, but I tell you we must push on. I've discovered something. I didn't tell you before lest I should raise false hopes. Look over there across the sand and tell me what you see."

"Water!" I cried, leaping to my feet. "It is a lake! How it sparkles in the setting sun! You are right—we must hurry on!"

"It's the divil's lake, I'm after thinkin'," I heard Terrence mutter. "Don't be desaved, Misther Inchbald. Remember what you were givin' me about the mirage only the other day."

Was it, then, but the mirage after all?

I could not—I would not believe it.

"Hurry! hurry!" I cried, gathering up the load I had dropped when weary beyond all expression I had sank hopeless upon the sand. "That is no mirage. It is water—clear, cold and sparkling."

"Don't be too sure, profess," said Gus. "I saw it some time ago, but I was afraid to speak. Here, take a little of this brandy; it will put some life into you, and if our lake proves to be genuine we shall soon have something to wash it down with."

Eagerly I accept the flask and drank.

Gus and Terrence followed my example, and we hurried on as the sun went down.

Then, of course, the lake disappeared. Still we pushed ahead bravely, for, to all appearance, it had been less than a mile away.

Shall I ever forget the horror of it?

Never, should I live to the age of the patriarchs of old.

Of course, it was very dark, since the moon would not rise until midnight.

Gus walked some rods in advance; Terrence, whose feet were in a frightful condition, being even further than myself in the rear.

I had my eyes fixed upon my boy, and was in the very act of calling to him to wait until I came up, when, to my horror, I saw him suddenly sink into the earth before my very eyes, uttering as he did so one loud, soul-rending cry.

Protecting powers! what had happened?

Almost maddened I rushed forward, perceiving before I had gone ten yards that my feet were treading upon a spur of rock, upon either side of which yawned a dark, bottomless pit, sunken below the level of the plain.

Did the sight deter me?

Not for an instant.

"Keep back!" I shouted to Terrence O'Gilligan, and then dashing on I found myself standing at last upon the end of the spur with naught save black nothingness beyond.

"Gus! Gus! Oh, my God!" I shrieked.

"Well, I am here, profess!" came the voice of my pupil, speaking in strangely calm accents at my feet.

I turned my eyes downward.

Horror unspeakable!

There, clinging with one hand to the projecting end of the spur, hung the form of Augustus Welby, his face raised, his eyes looking appealingly into my own, beneath the cold light of the stars.

"You must lie down on the rock and try to save me," he said, in the same calm tone. "I don't think you can do it, but at least you must make the attempt."

"If you go down into the bottomless pit, I go, too!" I hoarsely breathed.

Then I threw myself flat upon the narrow projection of the rock, and, bending over, seized him by the hand.

CHAPTER IV.

SAVED FROM AN AWFUL FATE.

Oh, the horror of that awful moment!

Shall I ever get so that I can think of it without a shudder?

I doubt it—I greatly doubt it.

Even words fail me when I try to write out what was said and done.

I only know that I pulled on the hand at which I had clutched so desperately, my own feet, as I lay, hanging over the spur on the other side.

"Go slow, profess! Go slow, old friend!" I could hear Gus say, in the same calm tone.

But I did not dare to look at him lest the sight should bring dizziness, which would bring with it also an end to everything, and I turned my head away and pulled—simply pulled.

He had let go the jagged end of the spur with the other hand now, and all depended upon my failing strength whether Augustus Welby and I, Theophilus Inchbald, lived or died.

I include myself because so sure had my boy Gus fallen I should have sprung after him.

I had fully resolved upon this.

If the bones of that handsome youth were to become a prey to wolves, hyenas or vultures, down thousands upon thousands of feet below the level of the plain, mine should be there, too.

You see, youth had already flown in my case, and there would be none to mourn me.

I was a bachelor, and, besides my cousin Spodkins, who coveted my little property, had not a relative that I knew of—besides, I loved the boy.

"Profess! She's a-comin'. Once more, now! Once more for the beers!"

"Heavens! How can he joke and drop into slang at such a moment?" was the thought which flashed across me.

And yet I actually believe I pulled the harder for it—it drew my attention from the horror of the situation—just as he had intended, no doubt.

I pulled with all my strength.

There—that is the strongest fashion in which I can put it.

I pulled with all my strength, and I pulled Augustus Welby up over the projecting end of the spur.

"Profess, where am I?"

"Och, now, an' it's tin candles I'll give to Saint Terrence instead of the six I promised. Sure, an' it's a blissid miracle what's happened—and all along wid me promising the candles to the howly saint."

Now, the first speaker was Gus, and he lay upon the sand far back from that dreadful spur and beyond the reach of all danger. The second, of course, being that faithful fellow, Terrence O'Gilligan, who had been vowing candles to his patron saint in the most reckless fashion, considering the exceedingly small prospect of any of us ever beholding even a candle-end again.

You see, when it was all over the first thing Gus did was to faint dead away.

I suppose the boy couldn't help it, for he fell upon his face without making a sound, and for many moments I feared he was dead.

I picked him up bodily—no lightweight be it understood—and staggering along the narrow projection, gained the sand at last, where Terrence O'Gilligan was on his knees and making a fearful clatter with his loud appeal to the "howly saints" to save the professor and young "Misther Gus."

Then I felt of heart and pulse and knew that he lived, and the feeling of thankful relief which came over me defies all words.

There was no water to be had, but I tried the brandy, forcing it between his tightly set lips.

Fanning him vigorously with my tourist's hat, I had the supreme satisfaction after a moment or two of listening to the words quoted above.

"Where are you? Still in the land of the living, thank God!" I exclaimed as soon as Terrence O'Gilligan would give me a chance to speak. "We both had a tight squeak of it, my boy, and the first sign of dawn we must turn back on our tracks and head for Mahla again."

"You say we had a tight squeak, profess? Where was your danger? Did you think for an instant that I would not have let go your hand if I found there was a chance of my pulling you down?"

"And do you think for an instant that I would not have jumped after you if you had fallen?"

"You would?"

"Certainly I would."

"Profess, you are crying!"

"I know it. I can't help it. I always do cry when I get excited. I know I'm only an old fool."

"You are the dearest fellow in the world, that's what you are!" exclaimed Gus, seizing my hand and squeezing it until the joints cracked again.

"I verily believe you would have committed sulcide on my account, you ridiculous old fellow—I do, indeed."

"You are not hurt?" I inquired, anxiously.

"Not in the least."

"How did it happen? However did you manage to get out to the end of that spur without seeing what kind of a trap you were walking into?"

"Blest if I can tell you, profess. That is—the fact is—well, you see, I was thinking of that face on the ivory tablet. I was wool-gathering, I suppose, for I never once observed my danger until my foot had slipped, and it was too late."

"That face will be the death of us all yet, Gus. However, it shall do us no more harm, for to-morrow back to Mahla we go."

"No, we won't!" he said, positively, setting upright on the sand as he spoke. "No, we won't!"

"What's the reason we won't? We have come to the end of our rope, you can't doubt that."

"By way of the land that has no bottom; by way of the level mountain which the wise men of Egypt believed to be the end of the earth," he muttered, quoting the words written on the tablet. "Don't you see, profess, or do you willfully blind yourself? Don't you see that it is all coming out true?"

I did not see it then so plainly as I saw it next day at sunrise.

Then with the return of light the words of the tablet were confirmed to a degree so remarkable that it fairly took my breath away.

Although we stood upon a level plain, so flat that in whichever direction we turned our gaze there was not an elevation the height of a tea-cup, yet we were on the top of a mountain so high and so precipitous that it fairly took our breath away to look down the rocky side.

It was as though the bottom had suddenly dropped out of everything.

What we had taken for water the evening before was nothing but empty space lying beyond the point where the sandy plain came to an end.

Had Terrence O'Gilligan and myself but advanced ten feet further it would have been all up with us.

The spur out on to which Gus, in his fit of abstraction, had walked, was the only projecting point beyond the line of that awful precipice in either direction as far as the eye could reach.

It was literally a level mountain; a land without bottom.

Still, as we lay flat upon our stomachs and looked over the edge of the precipice we could see far, far beneath us a wild, mountainous country, stretching off to the southward, the tops of its highest peaks seemingly hundreds of feet below the level of the plain.

"What do you think now, profess?" demanded Gus as we sat down to the cold breakfast of canned meats and crackers which Terrence O'Gilligan had prepared.

"I am bound to admit that the words of the tablet have been confirmed to a remarkable degree—there is no denying that," I replied.

"Of course you intend to go on?"

"I had rather go back."

"I hadn't. If we are to allow our courage to fizzle out at the first mishap we stand a poor chance of reaching the end of our journey."

"But how can we go on? Not even a mountain goat could descend that precipice."

"Oh, we don't know that," he replied, lightly, helping himself to more potted chicken. "We have only had one view of it. If Saint Cyprian could get down there is no reason why we can't."

"And your father and your grandfather?"

"Well, well; we don't know that they came this way. I tell you what it is, professor, I am bound to go on."

"That face is still running in your head?"

"Still running in my head. I shall never turn back until I have seen the queen who is never seen."

"Ain't that something of a paradox?"

"Perhaps it is; but how was the miniature painted if no one ever saw that glorious creature? You see, I fall back on St. Cyprian again."

"I see that you are bound to be rash almost to madness. One would think to hear you talk that you expected to find this interesting female alive after the lapse of sixteen centuries."

"And who shall say she is not?" he answered, lowering his voice and speaking in a wild, dreamy sort of way. "The ancients believed that there existed somewhere in Northern Africa a land where man never dies. Recollect the writing on the tablet? We have had two confirmations of its truth already."

"Two—I don't understand you."

"You don't? Was not the ancient tower at Mahla one? Is not this level mountain and all the rest another?"

"Oh, pshaw! That tower counts for nothing. There are such edifices scattered all along the coast of Northern Africa."

"It makes no difference. This particular tower was found precisely where it was stated in the writing we should find it, and——"

"And for that reason, and because we have happened to stumble upon an exceedingly curious geological formation, you are trying to make yourself believe that men can live on earth for thousands of years. Really, Gus, I gave you credit for more sense."

"There, there; we won't quarrel, profess. Where's Terrence O'Gilligan? I'm through with breakfast and want him to clear up. Confound the fellow! he is always out of the way when one wants him, and——"

"And here he comes now, shouting like a lunatic!" I exclaimed, looking behind me.

"Yes," cried Gus, springing to his feet, "and he's discovered something as sure as you live! Profess, what do you suppose it is?"

CHAPTER V.

TERRENCE O'GILLIGAN MAKES AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

Now we might have supposed and supposed, and kept on supposing until the crack of doom, but neither Gus nor I would have ever guessed the nature of Terrence O'Gilligan's discovery.

He came bounding toward us over the sand with his eyes protruding like a lobster's, and his short, red hair fairly standing on end.

"Oh, Misther Gus! Misther Gus! For the Lord's sake, let's get out of this haythen country while there's toime!"

"Well, well, what now?" demanded Gus.

"Speak up, can't you, O'Gilligan? Why, you ridiculous fellow, you look as though you had seen a ghost."

"The divil, sir."

"What! You have seen the father of evil?"

"No, sir, I've not seen himself, bad luck to him; nor is it Terrence O'Gilligan what wants to."

"Well, what then?"

"I've seen the place where he lives, sor, an' by the same token it's breakfast he's getting or else it's the smoke of some poor lost sowl what he's a frizzling in his fry pan down below."

"What on earth does the idiot mean?" said Gus, turning to me. "I can make nothing out of him. Try your hand, profess."

It was perfectly evident that Terrence O'Gilligan had seen something, and equally evident that he was too frightened to tell what that something was.

"Look here," I said, speaking in as quiet a tone as possible, "I want to know about this. Try and calm yourself—take a long breath before you speak."

"Faix an' I nade it, sor. It's the smell of the brimstone what's in me lungs a-choking me, I think."

"Now, then, what have you seen?"

"The door of the bad place, sor."

"There, there; none of that! Let us have some sense out of you if you've got any."

"Sure, an' if you was to kill me I couldn't tell you no different, Misther Inchbald. If it ain't the bottomless pit, may I die here in the desert and niver see Ballynashore again!"

"The bottomless pit! Ah, I thought so!" muttered Gus. "Look here, profess, it's confirmation number three!"

"If it is a pit of any kind it may mean water, and must be instantly investigated," said I. "Whether we advance or retreat, water we must have or leave our bones to whiten on these sands."

"Sure, an' I'll drink none of it!" mumbled Terrence O'Gilligan.

"None of what, you absurd creature?"

"None of the divil's howly wather. It's naught else ye'll be after drawing out of that pit."

"You'll take us to the spot and show us just what you have found, directly," said I with some impatience. "Come; march! Toddle! Show us the way."

It was with manifest reluctance that Terrence O'Gilligan obeyed me.

It appeared that he had been out hunting for water on his own account, when the discovery, whatever might be its nature, was made.

Once we got him started he led us along the line of the precipice for the distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile.

when suddenly halting he pointed on ahead in a frightened sort of way.

"There it is—don't you see it?"

"As true as I live it's smoke!" cried Gus, halting, too.

Of course, I did the same, and we all three gazed ahead.

There, ascending from the sandy level, a thin column of smoke could be distinctly seen.

"A volcano!" cried Gus.

"A hot spring, more likely!" I exclaimed. "Come, let us hurry on."

It was only with the greatest difficulty that we could persuade Terrence O'Gilligan to advance any further.

When at last I accomplished it he followed us—he would not lead the way—to the mouth of a great pit, some forty feet in circumference, sunk in the surface of the plain.

It was so plainly an artificial excavation that both Gus and I exclaimed to that effect in a breath.

There it was, a giant shaft hewn through the solid rock—the strata of sand was only a few feet in depth, as we could readily see—a mine shaft of enormous dimensions, whose proportions might well cause our most skillful engineers of Colorado or Nevada to blush for shame.

Though Gus and I, lying flat upon the sand, bent over and explored its depths long and earnestly, we could see no bottom.

What we did see, though—and this proved it most conclusively to be the work of man—was a series of copper eye-bolts let into the rock in pairs at a distance of perhaps a foot, one below the other, and about three feet apart.

"Now will yez belave me?" said Terrence O'Gilligan, sulkily. "If that ain't the bottomless pit I'd like to know what else yez can make of it? See that smoke? Smell the brimstone. I tell yez both no good can come of our remaining here with not a drap of howly water betwixt us to kape the divil off."

The smoke was a fact—the smell of brimstone purely the outcome of Terrence O'Gilligan's heated imagination.

As a matter of record the smoke was of the lightest kind and had no odor at all.

It rose from the pit in a thin, blue column, soon losing itself in open space above.

"Profess, this is wonderful!" said Gus, at length. "Now more than ever I am resolved to push straight ahead."

"Yes, yes," I answered, testily; "but how?"

"We'll keep on in this direction, skirting the precipice, and see what we find. You will admit, of course, that this wonderful shaft was sunk by the hand of man?"

"Of course, of course. There can be no question about that."

"Who were the people that executed this gigantic undertaking?"

"Who, indeed?

For days we had traversed that sandy plain without discovering the first trace of inhabitants.

Without water, without even a blade of growing grass, how could man have ever existed here?

"It's of little use to speculate," I answered. "That at some time in the past this country has been inhabited, is evident enough. Probably its condition has changed."

"It must have changed mightily," he replied. "Years were spent in sinking that shaft; years of time and the labor of hundreds of men."

"To say nothing of blasting powder, hammers and drills."

"All of which goes to prove that the world is very old—that nations have existed and disappeared in this wonderful land before the Arabs were even dreamed of. Profess, it is a perplexing thought."

A perplexing thought!

It was, indeed.

It overturned so completely my often expressed belief that whatever one might say of Egypt, the interior of Africa had been in a state of absolute barbarism from all time, that I had not a word to say.

By this time the objections of Terrence O'Gilligan to further invesitgation had quieted down into incoherent mutterings, and leading the way myself we began our advance.

We had not gone a thousand yards before an exclamation from Gus, whose sight was keener than my own, burst startlingly upon me.

"Look where you go!" he cried. "There's another just ahead."

He was right, sure enough.

Not five feet away was the mouth of a second shaft, in every way resembling the first, which in my abstraction I had not seen.

Eagerly we advanced toward it.

It was fully as large as its companion, and its bottom was equally lost in obscurity.

There were two essentially differing points about it, though, which must not be overlooked.

First, there was no smoke.

Second, there were two distinct sets of the copper eye-bolts, placed at a distance of some feet apart.

"Profess," cried Gus, "I tell you what it is!"

"Well, what?"

"Those eye-bolts—what do you make of them?"

"I don't know what to make of them."

"Well, I do, then. They once supported a ladder, or, at least, the rounds of a ladder, which amounts to the same thing."

It was a startling proposition, but one which I saw instantly could not be far from the truth.

In fact, as we bent over the mouth of this second shaft I thought that my eye could distinguish far down in the depths below me, cross pieces extending from bolt to bolt, and seemingly of wood.

When I called Gus' attention to this he agreed with me.

They were cross pieces, certainly, though of what material it was impossible to determine. So far down in the pit were they that it was just as much as we could do to see them at all.

"I'll bet you what you like there's another of these holes somewhere about here!" cried Gus, who was beginning to get excited. "Three has been a lucky number from the beginning of time. Here, you O'Gilligan, lay out beyond there and see if you can't find another while I measure the circumference of this."

"Troth, an' I won't thin, with all due respit to yes, Masther

Gus. If two of thim chimnies of the bad place ain't enough for you, why, thin, they are for me, an' to spare. It's not mesilf that's wanting ony more."

"Was there ever such a fool!" snapped Gus, who had already got out his tape-line. "Then catch hold of the end of this, will you, while I go around?"

But Terrence O'Gilligan would not do that, either.

He seemed determined to have nothing to do with these pits at all.

The end of it was Gus and I had to do the measuring.

We found the circumference to be thirty-nine feet six inches and one-eighth.

The measurement completed, we started on again, this time keeping a sharp lookout ahead.

"I told you we'd find it, profess!" exclaimed Gus, triumphantly, when at about the same distance of the second pit from the first, we discovered the third.

It was Gus who spied it first, and he ran on ahead, exclaiming as above.

I followed more slowly, and had not yet reached its mouth when his prolonged whistle told me that something new was up.

"Hello! What's the matter now?" I shouted.

"Why, nothing is the matter," he replied, calmly, "except that in this third pit the ladder rounds are all in position between the copper eye-bolts, and I'm going down to explore the bottom—that's all!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE DESCENT INTO THE PIT.

"You propose to descend into that hole—you are mad!"

"Mad or sane, profess, I'm going to do it. See, look down here; you and Terrence O'Gilligan are going, too!"

"I—not if I know myself! Why, there are three ladders, I declare!"

"Of course there are!" replied Gus, in that tone of quiet command I have ever found it so hard to resist. "One for you, profess, one for O'Gilligan and one for myself."

"Then if you think I am going to trust myself on a ladder with rounds a thousand years old, more or less, leading the Lord knows where, you are very much mistaken."

"But what is there to fear? If we find a shaky round we can avoid it—if all are shaky, why, of course, it's no go. Don't say a word to O'Gilligan to discourage him—you know you'll consent sooner or later. It's my firm belief that these pits are simply entrances to the land below us, constructed by the ancient inhabitants as so many roads from the lower to the higher level, and I'm going down to see."

It looked as though Gus must be right, it did, indeed.

Neither of the pits were at a greater distance back from the edge of the cliff than fifty feet.

If their bottoms were on a line with the land beneath us it was easy to imagine a short tunnel which would do the rest.

I now proceeded to examine the ladders closely, while waiting for Terrence O'Gilligan to come up.

There were three of them, as Gus had said, arranged side by side against that part of the wall most distant from the cliff.

The rounds, which, by the way, were not round but flat and about three inches wide, seemed to be of some hard wood closely resembling ash, and were secured to the copper eye-bolts by leathern thongs.

"See here, profess; here is something else!" cried Gus, suddenly he had been moving about the mouth of the pit. "If this ain't the work of the diamond drill it was made by something closely akin to it. Upon my word, this is the strangest thing of all!"

It was strange, there was no denying it.

On the side of the pit opposite the ladders there was an excavation hollowed out in the sand to the depth of a few feet, laying bare the ledge.

Here, piercing the solid rock, was a round hole evidently of great depth.

It was not over six inches in circumference, and looked, just as Gus had said, for all the world as though it had been made through the agency of the modern diamond drill.

By this time Terrence O'Gilligan had come up and was full of his ridiculous ideas, as usual, but so interested had we become in this new discovery that neither Gus nor I paid any attention to the fellow at all.

We threw large stones into the pit and smaller ones down the round hole.

In neither instance could we hear them strike the bottom, if bottom there actually was.

"I'm going down into that hole, and that's all there is about it!" said Gus, decidedly. "Profess, you'll follow me, of course?"

I said nothing.

The fact was, Terrence O'Gilligan was making protestations loud enough for us both.

Besides, I knew in the bottom of my heart that he would go in spite of all I could say to prevent it.

I knew also that I would never let him go alone.

We sent O'Gilligan back for our traps, and while he was gone Gus and myself advanced to the edge of the cliff, and with the aid of our powerful field-glasses, took a survey of the mysterious land beneath.

It was wild, it was mountainous; it seemed to be fertile, too, for we could see long stretches of green, sparsely covered with trees.

If it was an inhabited country we could not perceive it.

Certainly nothing resembling buildings met our gaze.

As to its distance below us we could only guess—it could not be less than two thousand feet.

Now the thought of descending two thousand feet of ladder in the darkness was not a pleasant one, but there was no gainsaying Gus Welby once his mind was set.

We had a fearful job to overcome the fears of Terrence O'Gilligan, and only succeeded in doing so at last through threatening to leave him, which he understood perfectly meant death.

"We must distribute our luggage to the best advantage," said Gus. "Each takes his share, profess, and it is agreed that we go slowly—the first broken round and we turn back."

I had long ago given myself up for as good as dead, and I knew O'Gilligan was mumbling prayers.

Much to my relief, Gus suggested that as it could now lack not more than an hour of noon we dine before the descent began.

Never have I seen such a sense of relief as was manifested by Terrence O'Gilligan.

He bustled about, spread the cloth on the sand, opened our canned provisions and got everything in readiness with a great show of alacrity, but as a matter of fact moving as slowly as he possibly could.

"Gus, can I say nothing to deter you from this mad act?" I asked, gravely, as we sat at our meal.

"Not a thing, profess, not a thing; for the reason that instead of regarding it as a mad act, I think it the wisest move we can possibly make."

"I cannot see it so."

"Then I can. You forget the writing on the tablet. By the way of the bottomless pit—that's what it says, and you can't deny that this pit before us is what is meant."

"I wish the tablet had been at the bottom of the pit sooner than it should have fallen into your hands."

"Very likely, but that don't alter facts. In two instances have we proved the truth of that writing. I now propose to prove it in the third."

At last we were ready.

I stepped on one ladder, Gus on another, and O'Gilligan, after using every effort to dissuade us, took the third.

"It's to me dith I'm going, an' it'll lay at your dure, Masther Gus!" he howled.

"Please yourself," Gus had said in answer. "Either you follow us or we leave you behind."

So down into the bottomless pit we went.

"Courage, profess—courage!" shouted Gus as the light above us died away. "These steps are as firm as the rock itself, and the easiest kind of climbing. Positively there is no cause for fear."

But I could not agree with him.

Who could tell where the next step would take us?

As for Terrence O'Gilligan, he made the pit ring with his dismal howls.

Down, down we went, deeper and deeper, the darkness growing more dense until it reached a point beyond which denser it could not grow.

Had we gone thousands of feet, or was it only hundreds? I could not tell.

It seemed to me as though we had been descending for hours, when all at once light broke upon us from below.

"Eureka! We are almost there!" cried Gus, the rocky walls echoing back his shout.

Then all at once there came a wild yell of despair from the other ladder, and to our horror and dismay we saw Terrence O'Gilligan lose his hold and topple backward into the pit.

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE PIT.

Neither Gus nor I uttered a sound beyond the first exclamation of horror.

Clinging desperately to the ladder, I tried to look down to follow the wretched O'Gilligan with my eyes, and I have no doubt that Gus did the same.

It did not amount to anything, however.

The light which had come to us from the bottom of the pit was far too faint to be of any use, and Terrence O'Gilligan was soon lost in the shadows beneath.

"God help him! He must be dead already," I could hear Gus from his ladder exclaim. "No doubt the breath is out of his body by this time. Do you think he has reached the bottom yet? Say, Profess, of course I know I'm to blame, but you won't despise me, will you, for bringing the poor fellow, through my stubbornness, to his death?"

"No, no, Gus," I breathed. "No, no, my boy. It was as much my fault as yours. But let us not waste another second. I can scarce keep my hold on these dreadful rounds. How long is it since O'Gilligan fell? We have not heard his body strike the bottom yet. My boy, I fear that it is but a question of a few minutes with both of us. I for one cannot maintain my hold much longer."

"Oh, yes, you can, Profess—you can and you must."

"My hands are one mass of blisters."

"So are mine, but I don't propose to despair. Why don't we hear that body strike?"

"Hilp! Hilp! The divil has me. Hilp! Hilp! Howly Saint Terrence! It's a hundred—yis, a thousand candles I'll give ye, and all of the purest wax. Hilp, Masther Gus! Hilp—hilp! for the love of God!"

Oh, the relief—the unspeakable relief!

That Terrence O'Gilligan still lived—that it was possible for him to be alive—brought to my mind such a sense of elation that I almost let go my hold.

The mystery of his continued existence I did not even think of.

Though we could not see him, we could hear him.

The pit fairly rung with his wild, terrorizing cries.

"Come on, oh, friends! Have no fear!"

These words, spoken in the purest Arabic, now sounded beneath us in a thunderous voice.

"Merciful powers! What now?" I could hear Gus breathe.

We had been lowering ourselves as rapidly as possible—had covered a dozen rounds perhaps, from the instant the voice of Terrence O'Gilligan first broke upon us—but now we both clung desperately to our ladders, not daring to move a peg.

"Oh, Christian friends, there is naught to fear!" repeated the thunderous voice again. "I who have just saved the life of your companion, will not harm you. Welcome—welcome to the land of the Quiloa! For the faithful followers of our blessed Saviour there is naught but welcome here.

The sound of the voice as it reverberated in my ears was something terrific.

Mingled with it were the dismal howls of Terrence O'Gilligan, calling to us to come down and save him from the devil, and addressing his appeal more particularly to me.

There was no chance to speak to Gus, for he was already at a considerable distance below me.

I could discern nothing as I glanced downward, nor did the voice speak again.

"Come, come," thought I to myself; "don't be a coward, and above all don't be a fool. No doubt the natural reverberation of the shaft produces the sounds which startle you. A human being speaks, and his words were of the most pacific kind."

"We come, oh, stranger!" I called aloud, in my choicest Arabic. "We are also followers of the Christ—we trust ourselves freely in your hands!

Protecting Powers!

My voice, though raised to its highest pitch, was but as the squeak of a mouse alongside of the roar of a lion compared with the voice which had spoken beneath me.

Still I could see that Gus was descending, and there seemed nothing for it but for me to follow his example.

I felt that it would be impossible for me to cling much longer to that dreadful ladder.

Sooner or later down I must go—it was better to climb than to fall!

I continued my descent.

Possibly the loud-voiced stranger who awaited us understood our alarm.

At all events, as I painfully lowered myself round by round, the voice sounded not again.

Nor, so far as further shock to my nervous system was concerned, was this necessary.

The light increased.

Now an exclamation from my boy full of terrified surprise caused me to turn my head in the direction of his ladder where before I had held it the other way.

Perhaps this part of my story may be doubted, nevertheless I am ready to affirm by all I hold sacred that it is as true as truth itself.

There was a man's face close beside me regarding me curiously.

A face and head of gigantic size.

"Shall I assist you, oh, stranger? The way has been hard—you have need of rest!"

Then, before I could reply or even recover from my terror, two enormous hands grasped me and lifted me from the ladder as though I had been an infant and gently placed me upon solid ground below.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FRIENDLY GIANT.

Give me time to regain my breath.

I need it!

Fancy yourself in my situation then!

I stood at the top of a rocky incline, facing a tunnel through which daylight dimly penetrated, with a being as tall as a church steeple looking down upon me in a benign, fatherly sort of way.

Gus stood beside me speechless.

Terrence O'Gilligan lay upon the rock, howling dismally all the while.

And yet, despite the strangeness of our situation, I saw at a glance there was nothing to fear.

The man who had lifted me from the ladder stood beside us, leaning against the rocky wall with his arms folded and gazing down upon us with an air of calm dignity which contrasted strongly with my own state of nervous terror.

Had he been so disposed, he could have crushed either of us with a blow. That he held himself as he did proved his pacific intentions beyond a doubt.

Must I describe him?

I suppose so.

That will lay me liable to the charge of outrageous lying I very well know.

Fully ten feet tall, with every part of his perfectly-formed frame in like proportion, it seemed to me then that this must surely be some wild vagary of an unbalanced mind.

He was naked, save for the skin of some animal girded about his loins; his own skin was dark and swarthy, his hair the blackest of black, and worn long about his shoulders, his beard, of the same dusky hue, extending almost to his waist.

He carried no weapon of any sort, and his face as it bent down toward us wore a mild, pleasing expression which speedily recalled me to myself.

"Nothing so very fierce about the fellow, is there, Profess?" whispered Gus.

Then with an angry movement toward the O'Gilligan, he added:

"See here, if you don't stop your noise I'll stop it for you—understand?"

Evidently the giant comprehended the movement.

"Why does the brother fear me, oh, stranger?" he said in the same fearful voice. "The Quiloa are Christians; they harm no one. That you also are followers of the cross I perceive from your dress"

"He fears your gigantic size," I replied as calmly as I could. "He is but an ignorant fellow. Our servant, sir. He will grow used to the sight in time."

"Ah, I understand," was the reply. "It is ever thus with my unfortunate people. We strike terror to the hearts of strangers, yet we are peaceable and harm no one. We cannot help our stature. We are as God made us. Had I not foreseen thy coming and stood beneath the ladders in readiness, that man would have lost his life."

"You saved him, then?" I inquired.

"I caught him in my arms as he fell. He was unconscious when I laid him down. Then when he saw me, this outcry began."

"You say you knew of our coming? How can that be possible?"

The giant laughed.

It was a sound that seemed to fairly shake the rocks about us.

"Later I will show you," he replied. "First tell me who you are, and from what nation, and above all why you come to the land of the Quiloa. You are Christians, of course."

"We are," I replied; "and from a far distant country. We seek the city of Tedla."

The giant started.

"Is it so?" he exclaimed. "Then let me warn you. Many have gone the road before you, it is said, not one of whom have ever returned."

"Can this be true? On the coast we heard that the way was not so difficult—saw and talked with those who claimed to have been near to it."

"Arabs?"

"Yes."

"The Arabs are all liars. We, the Quiloa, speak their language, but beyond that have nothing in common with them. Still, you are welcome, oh, friends. If you persist in this journey after hearing that which I have to tell thee, the Quiloa will bid thee God-speed."

Then he went on to tell us how no Arab had ever passed beyond the line of the precipice. How the lower rounds of the ladders were removed upon the approach of these desert marauders.

How it was known that they were on the level above he did not say.

Gus was for questioning him further, but I restrained him.

Already the giant had ordered us to follow him, and as our very lives depended upon keeping in the good graces of this man, by the side of whom we were as infants, I thought it best to obey.

By this time O'Gilligan had subsided into a state of dumb despair, and ordering him to collect together such of our belongings as he had managed to drop in his fall, I announced to our guide our readiness to depart.

"It is well," he said, with the calmness of manner that distinguished all his remarks. "There are those below who anxiously await us. Let me say to you once more have absolutely no fear. All Christians are welcome in the land of the Quiloa, though of a truth it is seldom we are favored with their visits. I can recall but one beside yourselves during my own lifetime, though my father has told me of others."

We had begun our march now.

The way led through the tunnel-like opening to which I have previously referred, and down a flight of broad steps cut in the solid rock.

Far below us the light seemed stronger, and I knew that ere long we must emerge into that mysterious sunken land which we had descried from the top of the cliff.

It was the man's last remark which started up Gus.

The fact was, my boy felt a little shaky about his Arabic, which he need not have done, since he spoke it as well as I did myself.

"You speak of having seen one Christian in your lifetime," he said. "May I ask you his name?"

"You may ask, but I cannot tell you, oh, friend. Nevertheless, thou shalt know it, for he wrote it for me on the rock in my house before his departure."

"On the rock in your house? What do you mean by that?"

Again the giant laughed.

I could hear Terrence O'Gilligan mutter "Saints presarve us!" as the fearful sound echoed back from the rocks above.

"You shall know in good time," he said, "for it is in my house you must dwell while you remain with the Quiloa. This man, in a measure, resembled yourself. He, like you, was bound for the mysterious city of Tedla. He left us to seek it, but, alas! he never returned."

I knew that Gus was thinking of his father, but I said nothing. What was the use?

Instead, I changed the subject abruptly by inquiring of our guide his own name.

It was Katunga—at least that was as near as I could get at it.

Then in return he asked our names, and when I told him he repeated them over many times, making terrible work of Terrence O'Gilligan's, which at last he gave up as a bad job.

"No matter," he said. "We who are Christians are all brothers—it makes no difference how we are called."

And so through the tunnel and down the stone steps we hastened on.

"Seems to be a peaceably disposed old party, don't he, Profess?" whispered Gus.

"He does, indeed," I answered. "My boy, you were right. 'By the way of the bottomless pit!' How wonderfully the writing on the tablet has been confirmed."

But there were other things besides the writing on the tablet which now demanded our attention.

We were dying of thirst for one thing, and Katunga, to whom we made this known, had promised us water as soon as we should reach the foot of the steps.

Besides, I myself was in a perfect fever of anxiety as to the reception we were to meet with at the hands of the Quiloa. I was wondering whether they were all giants, and why we had discovered none of their homes, which must be anything but ant hills, as we looked over the cliff.

Now, as he neared the end of the descent, Katunga suddenly turned aside into a passage opening off to the left of the steps, motioning to us to follow.

We did so, and found ourselves in a small chamber open on one side to the daylight, while on the other, let in against the rock at about the height of an ordinary man, was a round copper tube, into which a curious crystal of about the size of a toy agate was fitted, and in front of which the rock was worn smooth, as though from constant action of the feet of men.

"You asked me how I knew that you were on the level above," said Katunga; "and I am now about to show you. See, here is our watch tower. It was made by the race who dug that pit."

"What? Then your people did not sink that giant shaft nor construct those ladders?"

"No, no. We are late comers. I have heard it said that it is not more than a thousand years since the Quiloa, who seek peace and hate war, left their country far south of the Great Desert and took up their residence in this place."

"A thousand years. A long time," I answered.

"A long time, surely, but nothing to the age of the world. All that you have seen and all that you will see in and about this mountain was the work of another people, whose name even has been forgotten. See—look at the height of that glass. It is just right for you, but there is not a man among my people who has not to crouch low to bring it on a level with his eye."

"By George, it really is a glass!" said Gus, in English—he had been examining the tube. "It is as near like the small end of a telescope as possible. Ask him what it is for?"

"Ask him yourself," I said. "Your Arabic is quite as good as mine."

Gus did so, and was instructed to put his eye to the tube.

"Wonderful! Marvelous!" I could hear him mutter, while Katunga, with the air of the proprietor of some Bowery peep-show, stood beaming triumphantly down upon me.

"What is it?" asked I.

"Look for yourself and see. You remember the small hole alongside the pit?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Well, this is the other end of it, that's all, and as perfect a telescope as you ever looked through."

As Gus moved aside I hastily applied my eye to the crystal in the end of the copper tube.

Judge of my amazement when I beheld before me the expanse of desert we had left above, with a band of fierce Bedouins riding toward me, to all appearance within reach of my hand!

CHAPTER IX.

GUS FINDS HIS FATHER'S NAME CARVED IN THE ROCK.

It was wonderful!

It was marvelous!

In some strange manner the rays of light were gathered within that tube-like excavation pushed through the solid rock, and so retracted as to enable me to see all that was transpiring on the plain above.

Nor could Katunga explain the mystery.

There the tube was, and there it had been since the earliest recollection of the Quiloa, and they put it to the use for which no doubt it had been intended—to spy out the land at the top of the cliff.

Through its means he had seen us, and knowing by our dress that we belonged to the Christian race, and seeing us descend into the pit had gone to meet us upon our descent.

Quite different was his actions when I called his attention to the horde of Bedouins.

"Quick! Quick! We must hurry on," he exclaimed. "They are the robbers of the desert. I must sen some one to watch them. If they should attempt the descent into the pit, which they probably will not, the lower rounds of the ladder must be removed to cut them off."

Then he told us how the Quiloa lived in constant dread of the desert Arabs, and how they usually kept a watch at this singular telescope, that they might be informed of their approach.

"It was fortunate for you that you left the plain as you did," he added. "Had you encountered them, your lives would not have been safe."

And as he hurried us away I knew that Katunga spoke the truth.

Through the passage again, down more steps, and then at last that which we had been so long expecting.

We had reached the bottom of the bottomless land.

We were in that mysterious country beneath the cliff.

Instantly we were surrounded by a race of giants.

Men and women ranging all the way from eight to ten feet high clustered about us, boys and girls of seven or eight years as tall as ourselves; the very babes in arms were wonders, too. I saw none that would have measured less than a good four feet.

I can't begin to tell how they stared, how they pressed about, pulling us this way and that.

Of course we submitted to it all with the best grace possible.

Katunga tried his best to introduce us by the names we had given him, but made poor work of it.

Amid a tremendous chattering he made them understand two things; first, that we were Christians, and were to be treated well; second, that water was the one thing of which we stood most in need.

What was being done about the Bedouins overhead on the desert we neither knew nor cared.

They conducted us immediately to a crystal spring which flowed from a cavity in the rocky wall of the cliff near by, and there we drank our fill, now tasting the life-giving fluid for the first time since the second day before.

Our first impressions at finding ourselves in this land of giants were so peculiar that it is difficult to put them into words.

Whichever way we looked there was a human head towering above us, while the united sound of many voices all talking together was more like the rumbling of thunder than anything else.

And yet these people seemed perfectly harmless.

When we came to know more about them we found that this conclusion was perfectly correct.

As with the elephant, the most gigantic of beasts, so with the Quiloa, whom I have no hesitation of describing as the largest race of men on earth.

They were mild and childlike in their disposition, almost to absurdity, living entirely on fruits and vegetables, it being a stringent law among them that nothing but wild beasts and venomous snakes should under any circumstances be slain.

The very first thing that attracted our attention, once the ceremony of our first introduction among the Quiloa had been attended to, was the absence of dwellings of any sort.

The country before us was green and well watered, not only by a considerable river, which we could see in the distance, with horses and cattle grazing on its banks, but likewise by numerous streams which trickled down the mountainside.

There were broad meadows, fields under cultivation, shady groves, orchards—everything, in fact, except houses.

Of these there were none.

"Where on earth do these giants live?" whispered Gus to me, after the crowd had, by the command of Katunga, fallen back. "Can you understand it, Profess?"

I confessed I could not.

Terrence O'Gilligan allowed that there wasn't "a dure in Ballynashore what wud take wan of thim," but as this did not help us out any, I made bold to ask Katunga at once.

"Come and see," was his answer, and he led us around a projecting spur of the cliff, the people following.

What we saw was a wall of perpendicular rock rising to a great height, facing the fertile lowlands of which I have spoken.

Hollowed out in the face of this wall were a prodigious number of large chambers, arranged in long rows one above the other, and connected with the ground by means of ladders on the outside.

Now, though we had supposed that the entire population had turned out to meet us, we soon learned our mistake.

The mountainside fairly swarmed with giants.

All along the line we could see faces looking down upon us from rude wooden platforms, built out from the rocky chambers, upon which flowers in great tubs blossomed.

The men were all dressed like our guide, having only a breech clout about the loins. The women, however, wore a single gown of some sort of cloth, while the children went naked for the most part.

At sight of us they came flocking down the ladders and crowded around chattering to such an extent as to almost deafen us.

Of course, single voices here in the open air did not sound as loud as Katunga's when we first heard it in the pit; but combined they produced anything but a pleasant sensation on our ears.

"Come to my home," said our guide, noticing how confused we were getting.

And driving the people back he led us up several ladders and into a large chamber hollowed out of the solid rock.

"Do your people all live in these chambers?" I asked, glancing curiously about.

"They do, oh, friends. Yet the Quiloa built them not. They are the work of those who have gone before us, a people of whom we know not even the name."

The apartment in which we now found ourselves was lofty and spacious, but, save for a rude couch of great size, a mat or so, and some few articles of earthenware, it was entirely unfurnished.

What struck me strangely was the fact that the walls were beautifully painted, representing landscapes and animals entirely unknown to me, many being of enormous size.

When Katunga observed that these interested us he led the way into an inner and smaller chamber.

"See," he said, "here are pictures still more beautiful, and here also is where the Christian who came this way before you on his journey to the city of Tedla carved his name in the rock."

I could see Gus turn pale, and guessed the thoughts which were passing in his mind.

Before either of us had an opportunity to speak, however, our attention was attracted toward one of these rock pictures on the wall directly facing the entrance, which for the moment drove all other thoughts from my mind.

It was a life-size representation of the glorious creature painted in the miniature on the ivory tablet.

I who saw it am ready to affirm that no such picture ever did exist or ever can exist on earth.

With Gus beside me I stood gazing upon that beautiful countenance in rapturous awe, when a sudden sharp exclamation from my boy recalled me to myself.

"Look, Profess—look!" he cried. "It is indeed true! My poor father came this way before me."

He was right.

There beneath the picture, low down on the wall, was the name Augustus Welby carved in the solid rock.

CHAPTER X.

TERRENCE O'GILLIGAN DISCOVERS A STRANGE BIRD.

"I say, Profess! If O'Gilligan can't move a trifle faster we'll never reach the top of this mountain. Confound the fellow! What does he mean by his persistent lagging, I'd like to know."

"I can't quite understand it, I must confess," I replied. "Since he has nothing but himself to carry, the Quiloa bearers having taken charge of his usual load, one would think that he might manage to keep up with us; but O'Gilligan is a strange mortal. He is still frightened at the size of Katunga, whom I believe he will never forgive for saving his life in the pit. If he has come to believe that the worthy fellow is not the devil I am certain he considers him first cousin to Beelzebub—but, by the way, Gus, where is Katunga? We have allowed ourselves to fall as far behind our guide as Terrence O'Gilligan has fallen behind us."

"Katunga is on ahead there," answered Gus. "Look, don't you see his head above that great bowlder. There! he is beckoning to us. Profess, you are right. We are as bad as O'Gilligan ourselves."

We had been toiling up the side of a mountain for hours, an ascent so long and so steep that it already seemed to me that we would never reach its end.

Were we still in the land of the Quiloa?

By no means.

That gigantic but peaceful race inhabited only that narrow strip of country at the base of the cliffs dividing the sunken lands from the higher desert, which borders on the river Quil, from whence their name may be derived.

We had dwelt four days among this friendly people, a stay not only exceedingly pleasant but highly profitable as well.

In the first place my boy found in his father's signature cut in the rock beneath that glorious painting of the mystic "Queen who is never seen," uncontradictable evidence that thus far we had been but following in the footsteps of his long missing parent—evidence that was confirmed by Katunga's account of the last Christian visitor in the Quiloa country, which tallied with Gus' recollection of his father in many respects.

Years had passed since the elderly Welby had cut the letters of his name upon that rock.

Where was he now?

The thought kept Gus in a state of such feverish anxiety that I ceased to mention the matter entirely, since to talk about it constantly could do no possible good.

Finding that we were determined to proceed, the good Katunga set about looking after our physical welfare.

He himself promised to conduct us to the country of the Obongos, whom he described as a nation of pygmies and exceedingly fierce (which, by the way, neither Gus nor I believed at all, taking them to be simply ordinary men), and all the last day of our stay the good fellow was preparing hampers of provisions and skins of water—more, ten times over, than the united backs of Gus, O'Gilligan and I could have carried a dozen yards.

Now, while Gus did the "social act" among the Quiloa beauties—and even Terrence O'Gilligan so far forgot his fears as to take a hand in this—I devoted my time to studying the troglodytic dwellings, as the scientists call these curious rock chambers, and in making a careful examination of the pits.

It may be deemed an unimportant matter, but I may as well mention that on the wall of one of the pits I discovered an Egyptian hieroglyphic inscription, which proved to my mind conclusively that the ancient inhabitants of this sunken land were colonists from Egypt, and that the pits had been hollowed out as far back as the year 3568 before Christ.

What had become of these people was a mystery.

The Quiloa did not know.

No one will ever know.

They had departed, leaving these wonderful pits and chambers behind them, rock cuttings that a hundred centuries will not efface.

The Quiloa had no king or ruler of any kind that I could discover. Four elders of the tribe settled differences when they arose, which Katunga informed me was seldom the case.

One thing more.

I was curious to learn how this race of giants became converted to Christianity, and my surprise can well be imagined when I state that I found abundant evidence that they had received instruction in regard to the doctrines of the Saviour of mankind from no less a person than St. Cyprian himself.

This was proven beyond all doubt by the discovery that there was preserved among them a single copy of the Sacred Scriptures written in the Arabic language bearing the autograph of that pious father of the early Church, below which was inscribed the date 217.

This was such a tangible proof of the absolute truth of the writing on the tablet, which during so many centuries had remained in the possession of the Welby family, that even I could no longer doubt.

Now I found myself fired with an ambition to reach the mysterious city of Tedla which I had never felt before.

Let Gus rave about the beauty of the "queen who is never seen" as much as he would. If fortune so favored our undertaking that I could once behold the original Greek version of the Bible it would be quite enough for me.

On the fifth day we resumed our journey.

With Katunga as our guide and four gigantic specimens of the Quiloa tribe as bearers of our increased luggage, traveling was quite a different affair from our painful journey across the desert.

We crossed the river Quil and spanned the fertile plains beyond, and were now nearing the top of the range of mountains which I had descried from the cliffs.

I think it was a little after three o'clock in the afternoon when the conversation between my boy and myself, noted at the beginning of the chapter, took place.

The last words from Gus had scarcely been spoken, when a loud yell of terror from O'Gilligan attracted the attention of us both.

It attracted the attention of Katunga, too, and as we started back to ascertain what had happened the Quiloa came running after us with gigantic strides.

"What can be the matter now?" exclaimed Gus impatiently. "Terrence O'Gilligan is becoming a positive nuisance. First it's one thing and then another. See! He is coming up the mountainside with his red hair all on end."

"And he has good reason for this alarm, oh, friends," said Katunga, looking down the slope. "Do you not see that black object behind him? Quick! Have your rifles ready! There—it rises! It is about to swoop down upon your unfortunate servant! Quick, or it will be too late!"

Now I am not certain which of us observed it first, Gus or myself.

For an instant we stood as though paralyzed at the fearful sight.

It was a gigantic creature with wings, whose span must have exceeded the height of Katunga himself, with four legs, armed with frightful claws and an enormous mouth filled with teeth more terrible to behold than the teeth of a shark.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SEA WITHOUT WATER.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Two shots from Gus' rifle, one from my own.

Which did the business it would be hard to say.

With a strange, almost deafening cry, the huge bird fell to the earth within two feet of Terrence O'Gilligan—dead.

"Heavens—what sort of a creature is it?" cried Gues, in English.

I hastily put the same question to Katunga in Arabic, and he gave it a name which has escaped my memory as I write. O'Gilligan came rushing toward us pale as death, and for once speechless.

That the creature had suddenly risen into the air from a cliff above him, I did not ascertain until later on.

"Look here, Profess! I claim to know something of natural history, but never, never have I seen or read of any creature resembling this!"

Now we were bending over our capture, with Katunga and the Quiloa bearers—who had come hurrying up—beside us.

There was such a chattering in Arabic that I could scarcely make my voice heard above the din.

Let me describe the creature, and then wonder at the excitement, if you can.

It was a true aerial reptile.

Picture to your fancy a gigantic thing having the body of a frog, the wings of a bat, a mouth like an alligator, and a head and neck like a bird.

Its color was jet black and it had no feathers.

Measured by my pocket tape line the span of its outstretched wings was sixteen feet seven inches and an eighth, of its mouth

from the thin, arched neck to the end of the snout, four feet eleven inches and one-half.

As for its legs, they measured two feet and over in length, and each being provided with claws as big around as a man's finger, it is not to be wondered that when he beheld this terrific flying toad swooping down upon him O'Gilligan grew mad with fear.

"Where did you first see it?" I demanded, as soon as our servant had regained his powers of speech.

"Sure it was sitting perched on yonder cliff, Misther Inchbald. I niver looked at it but wanst, an' that was sideways, whin up it flew like an aigle and made wan dive for me hid."

"And it's a lucky thing for you that we were so near," Gus chimed in. "Now perhaps you'll manage to keep up with us. Profess, what is the matter? You are chuckling away to yourself over that skinny nightmare as though you had struck a prize."

"And so I have, my boy, so I have."

"How so?"

"Do you know what this creature is?"

"No, I'm sure I don't. It looks more like a huge flying sculpin than anything I can think of just now."

"It's nothing of the sort."

"I didn't say it was."

"Gus, I know exactly what it is, and it proves the theory which I have always maintained."

"I suppose you do. Show me the man who dares to say that you don't know everything appertaining to the sciences and I'll thrash him! What's your theory, Profess? Let's have it out."

"My theory has always been that many, if not all the prehistoric animals whose remains geologists find in the rocks, still exist in remote places where man has never penetrated."

"Good! I'll agree with you without giving it a thought. Now, then, our skinny friend is prehistoric, is he? What's his name?"

"It's a long one."

"And tough one to pronounce?"

"You may well believe it."

"All right. Let's have it. I can stand it, I guess," laughed Gus in his merry way.

"What would you say to Pterodactyle."

"Ptero—what?"

"Pterodactyle—the great winged lizard of the Jurassic period."

"Here, here!" cried Gus. "None of that now! We'll call him Terry—a good Irish name in honor of the discoverer. Come, O'Gilligan, what do you say to that?"

"Sure an' yez can call him what ye like so that yez don't call him my way, Masther Gus. Sorra a peg would I ever stirred on this journey had I known we were to meet craytures like himself."

"What's that Katunga was just saying?" broke in Gus at this juncture.

"Simply that the Pterodactyle is nothing to another creature we may have to encounter. I can't quite make out from his description what it is, but I am strongly inclined to believe that it may be prehistoric, too."

Much as I would have liked to have preserved the Pterodactyle, we were forced to leave it where it fell.

It was more than I could do to lift it from the ground, and to think of burdening ourselves with the strange creature was, of course, absurd.

"If we are to reach the top of the mountain by sundown we must be moving, oh, friends," Katunga said.

Move we did forthwith, and such a scrambling over rocks and debris I never experienced before.

What was to be the end?

What kind of a country should we behold beyond the opposite slope?

Katunga had called it a desert.

Firmly as both Gus and myself had now become believers in the truth of the writing on the tablet, I am certain that neither of us had the least conception of what was to come.

Now, I had frequently observed among the Quiloa rude ornaments of gold, and not a few small nuggets pierced and worn about the necks of the women, sometimes singly, at others in groups strung together as one would string a neckless of beads.

When I asked Katunga where all this gold came from he shook his head and said that gold brought with it a curse; that it made men kill each other, and talked altogether in a very curious sort of way.

I was walking by the side of my gigantic friend, and the top of the mountain was just before us, when all at once he alluded to this conversation again.

"Oh, friend, is it still your resolve to journey to the mysterious Tedla?" he asked.

"It is, Katunga. Nothing can deter us from it."

"Again let me warn you of the dangers before you. Listen. Suppose that I could give you all the gold that it were possible for you and your companions to carry, would you not then turn back? Answer not hastily. Take time to reflect."

"Oh, Katunga," I replied, "we must not turn back. We are men, not children; that to which we have put our hand must be done."

"At the cost of life?"

"At the risk of life, certainly; but tell me—what do your words imply? Is it, then, in your power to put us in possession of the gold of which you speak?"

"Of more than all three of you could carry hence in a lifetime," replied the Quiloa, letting his voice fall. "We are almost there, oh, friends. You shall behold for yourselves."

"Is he going mad?" whispered Gus in English. "More gold than we could carry away in a lifetime! It is absurd."

"Depends upon how far we have to carry the first load," I answered, somewhat sententiously. "But see, Katunga has reached the sumit at last, and is beckoning for us to come on."

And we hurried forward to the spot where the Quiloa stood.

"Profess! Profess! Look! Oh, look!"

Never shall I forget my first sensations when that wondrous prospect broke upon my gaze in the light of the setting sun.

We were at the very top of a mountain now, and below—far, far below—lay spread out before us a vast expanse of what, for the moment, I took to be water lashed into enormous waves, as though by some furious gale.

What one saw the other saw; the question was which would speak.

That there were no waves which lay before us we both well knew.

That which looked like waves to us were simply great masses of sand of dazzling whiteness, blown up by the wind into innumerable wave-like forms.

"Profess?"

"Well, Gus?"

"The writing on the tablet has been fulfilled again."

"How so?"

"How so?" he exclaimed almost petulantly. "If ever there was such a thing as a 'sea without water,' you and I are looking down upon one now."

CHAPTER XII.

A GOLDEN VALLEY.

A "sea without water!"

Well, so it was!

There it lay below us as the sun went down, looking so much like water that it seemed hard to believe there was nothing but a stretch of burning sand.

It was a desert completely surrounded by mountains.

An immense hollowing out of the range, which beyond all question had been filled with water at some time in the distant past.

I asked Katunga its name, and the words he gave me signified "sea without water" in English, sure enough.

To longer question the truth of the writing would have been mere folly, and I admitted as much to Gus as we lay in camp upon the mountain top that night.

By the way, Katunga said nothing more about the gold, nor did I mention it again that night, and when we were up next morning something occurred that drove it for the time being all out of my head.

This time it was Gus—not Terrence O'Gilligan.

My boy had risen before me, and walking out upon the edge of the cliff, was surveying that wonderful sand sea through our field glass, when I saw him suddenly spring back and come running toward me, shouting my name.

"Profess! Oh, Profess! For gracious sake look here!"

I joined him instantly.

"What now?" I exclaimed.

"Another of your prehistorics, and a veritable monster! Jumbo is nowhere alongside of him."

"You don't mean it. Where?"

"Down on the sand below I caught a glimpse of it, but in my anxiety to let you know, did not stop for a good look. There, see for yourself."

I did not need the glass to see it.

Out upon the waterless sea, at no great distance from the foot of the mountain, I could perceive with the naked eye a huge beast moving slowly with a heavy, lumbering gait.

"What do you make out of it?" cried Gus, thrusting the glass into my hand.

I seized it, and adjusting the focus had the extreme pleasure of gazing upon one of those strange creations believed by all scientists to have disappeared from the face of the earth before the coming of man.

Can I describe it?

I can try, though I greatly doubt if any words of which it is within my power to use can convey an accurate impression of what I saw to the reader's mind.

Picture to yourself a huge monster of over forty feet in length, and standing higher than the trunk of an elephant of ordinary size could possibly reach.

It is hard work to fancy such a brute, and I know that my word will be doubted.

Nevertheless, since in any good work on geology an accurate portrait of my new prehistoric can be found, all I can say is, if you never have examined it do so at once, and rest assured that you will find yourself well repaid.

The field glass brought the brute so near to my vision as to make it seem to me that all I had to do was to stretch forth my hand and touch him.

His body was thick and clumsily shaped and covered all over with scales like a crocodile; there was a huge hump above the shoulders just back of the small, ugly head, which more closely resembled the head of some giant codfish than anything else with which I can compare.

Add to this a tail of the shape of the crocodile's, five times as long, short legs—say ten feet in length—ending in a split hoof, like a cow, all covered with the same scales that incased the body, and you must have the best description I am capable of giving of the monstrous creature I saw shuffling along over that waterless sea.

I gazed so long that Gus got tired of waiting to hear me speak.

"Come, I'm dying to know what you call it," he said. "Of course you know all about him. Heavens! what a harvest we could reap if we only had him penned up in the Madison Square Garden home in New York."

"I do know all about him," I replied quietly. "For this sight I would not exchange even the original Ptolemaic Bible which we hope to find. Gus, I shall begin this very night to write a paper for the Scientific Review, showing up the modern school of geologists to be the idiots and humbugs they really are. Now, thank goodness, I am in a position to prove my theory that the so-called prehistoric animals actually still exist."

"Well, I don't know whether you can or not," replied Gus, pulling me down off my high horse by his next remark. "Do you suppose anyone will believe you ever saw it, Profess? Even with me to corroborate you, I feel sure your statement will be doubted. It will be like the sea serpent, you know. No, no, you are as bad off as you were before."

He was right.

I saw it at a glance.

"Well, I think I will delay beginning my paper until our return," I said, with a sigh.

"Suit yourself about that, profess, but will you tell me the name of that brute down there? I'm not going to ask you again."

"Oh, excuse me; it is a Megalosaur, one of the Dinosaur, or 'terrible lizards' of the same geologic period as the Pterodactyle."

"Good enough! I shall remember his name just about two minutes. Here, give me the glass! I want to have another look at him, as I see he is moving away."

By the time Gus got through inspecting the megalosaur Terrence O'Gilligan had spied it, and came running up and making a terrible clatter.

This aroused Katunga and the Quiloa, and when at last the huge beast disappeared behind a group of sand hills he certainly could lay claim to an admiring audience, if nothing else.

From Katunga I learned that this was the animal to which he had referred, and that these strange beasts were but seldom seen, and never outside of the great basin of the waterless sea.

Katunga had prepared us a superb breakfast, and having partaken to our hearts' content, the descent of the mountain began, for as Gus and I had surmised, the way to this Obongo country led across this waterless sea.

Not until we had gained the foot of the descent—and this was nearly noon—did the recollection of Katunga's mysterious allusion to gold recur to my mind.

During the last half hour of our descent I had observed on looking out upon the sand a curious yellow sheen intermingling itself with the dazzling whiteness of this ancient sea bottom.

Now and then the sunlight would catch it, and it would glitter strangely, and all at once I knew that it was the glitter of gold.

Gold! It was everywhere!

We saw it scattered about us in little yellow nuggets the instant our feet struck the sand.

Katunga shot toward me a glance of triumph.

"You see, oh, friend," he said in his quiet way," I spoke the truth. We have entered the valley of gold."

CHAPTER XIII.

A TANTALIZING DISCOVERY.

Gold! It was everywhere!

It was scattered about to the right, to the left, behind and before us over the waves of that waterless sea.

You should have seen Terrence O'Gilligan go for it!

No sooner did he discover the true character of the "yaller stones," as he at first called the little nuggets, than he began to fill his pockets, his handkerchief, and even to stuff them inside his shirt.

"Sure, an' I'll buy all Ireland!" he cried as he ran here and there gathering nuggets as easily as one could pick up pebbles on the beach at home. "I'll buy out the landlords—I'll let ivery man have his cot rint free! I'll have the finest house in Dublin, an' me coach an' four! Howly murther, but it's afeared I am that I'll not be able to carry much more than I've got already. Wow! wow! but more's the pity this gowld is sich hivy stuff!"

I actually thought Gus would burst a blood-vessel, he laughed so, though I am obliged to confess to not being much better myself.

Even the giant Katunga could not help smiling grimly at the eagerness displayed by Terrence O'Gilligan in gathering up the gold.

"He is foolish!" remarked the Quiloa, shaking his great head solemnly. "That yellow stuff has caused all the trouble in the world. My people will have none of it; it would only bring us sorrow. The women come down from the mountains yonder and get it, and what good does it do them? None—I say, none! They are always at war—always killing and being killed. The Quiloa are better off than they are. No, no; oh, friends, touch it not! There lies a curse in every grain! For that, take my word!"

"Women—you say the women kill and are at war—you mean the men, do you not?" I demanded, thinking I had not understood his Arabic aright.

But before Katunga had time to reply an accident occurring to one of the bearers, who had stepped in a hole in the sand and let fall a good part of his load, called his attention off, and somehow or other the matter did not come up again.

That I had cause to recall it later on we shall presently see.

"Profess, do for heaven's sake make O'Gilligan throw away that gold!" cried Gus, who having got the better of his fit of laughter, now came running up. "See, he has so loaded himself down that he can scarcely waddle. It's no sort of use to us. We couldn't buy a crumb of bread with the whole of it, even though we were starving, yet here are millions of dollars scattered over the sands before our eyes.

It was true.

Nor could I refrain from much idle speculation as to the means we should employ to cart a million or so away on our return.

But this was nothing—positively nothing.

After hours of travel across the sand hammocks of this old sea bottom, kicking golden nuggets before us at almost every step, Katunga led us to the brink of a great yawning chasm at the bottom of which was a miniature basin of precisely the same character as the large one, upon whose surface it was but a slight indentation.

The bottom of this chasm was literally one mass of gold.

"Wonderful! Marvelous!" were the exclamations of Gus and myself as we bent over the brink.

Then Katunga, who had come up, pointed out to me some steps cut in the rock leading down to the chasm and we all descended them and stood surrounded by gold enough to buy up all the kingdoms of the earth.

Now, although this had not come upon us suddenly, since Katunga had been repeating all the morning that he would show us something of the sort, we stood in speechless wonder, too much overcome to utter a sound.

Long before this O'Gilligan had emptied his pockets—he was forced either to do this or be left behind—but had still clung to his handkerchief. Even this load he now cast aside.

"It's too much! It's too much!" he cried. "Sure, an' it makes me fairly sick. Gowld iverywhere, an' it might as well be Irish turf for all the good it can do us. Wait till we come back, though! Then, me yaller beauties, it's mesilf that'll not lave yes behind!"

When we come back.

Ah! when would that be?

Would we ever come back?

I had my doubts, I confess, but of course there was no use in expressing them then.

"I'm glad to see that you are getting some sense, O'Gilligan," said Gus. "Look here, profess, what brought all this stuff here—that's the question which is puzzling me."

"Just what I was thinking about myself," I replied, "and to my mind the answer is very simple, but it involves a bit of geological talk which always bores you, you know."

"Never mind, let's have it."

"Well, you see this whole plain was once an old sea bottom."

"I understand."

And being surrounded by mountains must necessarily have caught all the sand and debris which was washed down their sides, away back in prehistoric ages, when it rained in this country, which it seldom does now."

"And you think the gold was washed down from the mountains?"

"Unquestionably. There cannot be a doubt that those higher lands are filled with gold-bearing veins. Now right here in this pit is the lowest level, and here the great mass of the gold collected when the water finally dried up and left this old sea bottom in the condition you see it now."

"Marvelous! Oh, profess, profess! if we only had this where we could use it—if we only had!"

Now, since the bare thought made me sick, I made no reply, but began prowling about and soon discovered the ruins of a stone hut around a turn in the rocky side of the cliff.

It did not astonish me much, for I had expected it.

Nor was I surprised at finding a long inscription in the Egyptian hieroglyphic characters.

Now the motive of that mysterious people who had cut the steps, who had hollowed out those curious rock dwellings and sunk the great pits, was plainly to be seen.

They had been a colony of Egyptian miners—they had come here to dig the gold.

And what had it availed them?

Probably they had carried away millions—no doubt billions.

Perhaps it was gold from this old sea bottom which had met the cost of constructing the pyramids and the massive temples in the far-distant valleys of the Nile.

But they were all dead and gone now, leaving only these few traces behind, and the secret of this strange land had died with them, remaining only in the possession of that strange race, the Quiloa, who made no use of it at all.

Hark! What thunderous sound was that?

It was only Katunga calling us to dinner on the level above.

"Well, my boy," I said to Gus, "since we can't eat gold, and must eat to live, let us cry quits at once and turn our backs upon all this wealth."

And this we reluctantly did.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE COUNTRY OF THE DWARFS.

We left the golden valley behind us, crossed the sea without water, reaching the foot of the mountains on the other side by the setting of the sun.

Here we went in camp again, and after supper was over Gus and I stretched ourselves out beneath a giant palm which grew

beside a little stream flowing from the mountain side, only to lose itself in the parched sands a few rods away.

"Now what next, profess?" asked my boy, after a brief silence. "We have given ourselves up so completely to Katunga's guidance that we shall miss him horribly when he goes back. Is he to take us over this range or not? I seem to be a miserable hand to draw anything out of him, his language is so high-flown and ambiguous—but hush! Here he comes. You tackle him and find out if you can what his intentions for to-morrow are."

Gus was right.

It was hard to draw much information from Katunga.

How much the giant actually knew concerning the country which lay beyond us even I, with my superior knowledge of Arabic, had been unable to find out.

It was like pulling teeth to get anything out of him.

He was so full of his mysterious allusions to dwarfs and nations composed solely of women, and similar nonsense—mere idle legends, I thought them—that I had almost given up questioning him at all.

Now, as he approached and stood towering above us, with his arms folded in that provokingly dignified way he had, I determined to let him do the talking for once, and for a while, at least, not to question him at all.

His first words shattered my resolution, as a thrown stone shatters a pane of glass.

"Oh, friends! I have come to bid you farewell."

"What! You would leave us now?"

"I must. Duty to my people compels me. We start back across the waterless sea to-night, that we may gain the foot of the mountains by the break of dawn. May heaven guard our steps and bring you back to us in safety! Such is my prayer, my wish; but knowing as I do know that if you persist in advancing you will never return, once more I entreat you to abandon your project and go back with us."

"Katunga," I said as calmly as possible, "what must be must be. We grieve to part with you, and from the bottom of our hearts we thank you and your people for all the kindness we have known at your hands. Nevertheless we cannot go back. It is written in the book of fate that we must go on to the land of the queen who is never seen. At the mysterious city of Tedla only can our journey end."

"Bravo, profess!" whispered Gus, who had been following my Arabic closely. "You have caught Katunga's high-flown style splendidly. Tell him how sorry I am to part with him, will you? Upon my word, he is a good old soul."

"Tell him yourself when I am through with him," I answered. "There's nothing in the world to prevent you from speaking Arabic as well as I do, if you would only try. But enough of this, he is speaking again."

"I shall urge you no more, oh, friends!" the giant continued. "Your way lies over this mountain and down on the other slope into the country of the Obongo. Of them beware! They are small, but very wicked. They will kill you if they can."

"Have you seen them, Katunga?"

"I have not, but others of my people have."

"They speak Arabic?"

"They do not. Their speech is the speech of the monkey—a mere chatter—no man can learn it no matter how hard he may try."

"Tell me," I continued, "how lies our way after we leave this dwarf country?"

"You ask me now what I know only by hearsay, but such knowledge as I have I give you freely. Many years ago one of my people became seized with the desire to visit the city of Tedla.

"He did not reach it, but he saw it in the distance from the top of the black mountain. It is from him that I know the dangers. Beyond the dwarf country, oh, friends, lies a stretch of plain, at the end of which is the land of the women——"

"Stop right there!" I exclaimed. "You have spoken of this nation before. Do you mean to say that there can be a country where men are unknown?"

"Does it not seem strange?" he answered. "Yes, it is so; at least so the report comes to me. I know no more. Beyond this people is the black mountain which I have mentioned before; from the top of this the city of Tedla can be seen far away to the westward. I know no more."

How much we missed Katunga, words fail to express.

All through the following morning we toiled up the mountainside, O'Gilligan feeling that he had lost a whole mule team, I venture to say, since he was now loaded to the eyes, Gus and I a friend.

Well, there was no help for it. We could only feel thankful that the kind-hearted giant had stuck by us as long as he had.

Of course, we helped do some of the carrying, and it is needless to say that by the time the top of the ascent was gained many of the good things bestowed upon us by the friendly Quiloa had been left behind.

The view from the mountain-top was grand beyond expression.

Have no fears, reader, I am not going to launch out into any prosy description, but shall only allude to a great wooded plain which lay below us, stretching off as far almost as the eye could reach.

And while we gazed, two things struck us strangely.

One was that beyond the plain, far in the distance rose another mountain whose peculiar appearance caused Gus to cry out at once.

It was perfectly black.

No trees seemed to spring from its side, and while dozens of other mountains rose about us, all having that bluish tinge usually seen upon looking at mountains from a distance, this did not possess one varying shade to soften its dusky hue.

"There's the black mountain, as sure as you live," said Gus, after looking at it a long while. "Now, then, where is the dwarf country? According to all accounts it ought to lie almost under our feet."

Now this brings me to my second proposition.

We could see the whole stretch of the plain beneath us without being able to distinguish the slightest trace of a settlement—not even a solitary hut.

"Perhaps the Obongo live in rock chambers, too," suggested Gus.

But when just after dark we reached the plain at last we could discover no trace of rock dwellings either; and by the time we lay down to sleep in camp that night we had about come to the conclusion that the dwarfs were a myth.

I cannot tell how long I slept.

All I know is that I was suddenly awakened by a sharp cry from Gus.

"Great Scott, profess, something stung me!" he cried, springing up and looking wildly about him. "It took me in the back of the neck, and—look out! look out! Cæsar's ghost! was there ever the beat of this!"

Gus seized his rifle and I mine, shouting to Terrence O'Gilligan as I did so.

Now we had good cause for alarm, for through the open door of the tent a perfect shower of tiny arrows had entered which had been shot in from the outside.

I was out first—Gus close behind me.

To our amazement we beheld a crowd of naked pigmies fleeing in every direction—men and women perfectly formed, the tallest not over three feet high.

We were in the country of the dwarfs!

CHAPTER XV.

AN ARMY OF WOMEN.

Away back in the old Grecian days, some hundreds of years before the time of Christ, Herodotus—one of the oldest writers whom one know anything about—told the world that he saw dwarfs in Africa, and the world laughed at him and called him a liar for his pains.

It was just the same with the noted traveler, Paul Du Chaillu. He visited a nation of dwarfs in the Congo country, and having had the courage to tell what he saw, the learned societies of Europe were up in arms against him at once.

Now, there are dwarfs in Africa, for we saw them.

As I fully expect that the veracity of my narrative will be questioned in any case, I make this statement boldly and without the slightest reserve.

We had been attacked by the dwarfs, who had thought to kill us while we slept.

Very foolishly Terrence O'Gilligan, who came running out of the tent, discharged his gun.

That settled it.

In a twinkling the crowd of little people who had paused for the instant at some distance away to look back at us had disappeared in the forest, the stillness of the night echoing with their strange, wild cries.

I could have kicked O'Gilligan.

The arrows of these little people might be dangerous, but, then, we, with our superior intelligence, had every chance in our favor, and I intended to make the acquaintance of the dwarfs.

"What the mischief did you do that for?" shouted Gus.

"Sure, they're nothing but a pack o' monkeys, sor."

There was no use in scolding O'Gilligan. In fact, when I came to think of it his was a natural enough action.

Of course, sleep was banished for the night, and having built a good fire we lit our pipes and gathered round it, waiting for the return of the dwarfs, but in vain.

Katunga was right—the Abnogos were not only dwarfs, but they were likewise as fierce as the gigantic Quiloa were peaceful.

As we knew afterward, they are great cowards, too, attacking their enemies only in the dark.

Now when morning came at last, and not the first sign of a dwarf had been seen, we almost began to believe that we had all three been deceived by bad dreams.

Had it not been for the great number of tiny arrows which had been shot into the hut and still lay scattered about we might actually have believed this.

As it was, we started on our way, keeping a good lookout for the dwarfs.

We were now in an open forest, a land resembling closely a well-kept English park, and watered everywhere with small streams.

This time I made the startling discovery—and it was not so very startling, either, being simply a deserted village of the dwarfs.

We had not advanced more than half a mile, I walking in advance, when up from the tall grass about our feet started one of these little beings so suddenly that it brought my heart into my mouth.

It was evidently a man, and an old one, for his hair was white and he wore a thin, grizzled beard, his face being one mass of wrinkles and his limbs shrunken; yet this strange being was no bigger than a boy ten years old.

He held a little bow in his hands, and with a quick movement shot one of those tiny arrows at me.

Then turning he ran off among the trees with incredible speed.

"After him, profess!" shouted Gus, who, with Terrence O'Gilligan, now came running up. "We are good for the whole Obongo nation, I guess. I'm bound to have a good square look at a dwarf."

And we dashed through the forest with all the speed our burdened condition would permit, only to lose sight of the flying Obongo a few moments later on.

What we did find, however, was one of their villages; coming suddenly upon it a few moments later only to discover that the entire population had taken to its heels on our approach.

"Upon my word, this beats everything!" was Gus' first exclamation when we found ourselves in the midst of a cluster of little huts some six feet long, and in no case more than four feet high.

The materials of which they were constructed were the branches of trees bent in the form of a bow with the ends stuck in the ground, the middle branches being the highest, which made the shape of each house very much like the half of an orange placed with the flat side down.

This frame work was covered with leaves, and there were little doors which did not seem to be more than eighteen inches high and about twelve or fifteen inches broad.

Even the dwarfs must have had to lie flat upon the ground in order to pass in and out.

I managed to crawl into one of them, Gus following me, while Terrence O'Gilligan, with that prudence where he himself is concerned which always charaterized him, chose to remain outside.

We found within the hut two little piles of sticks which must have served as beds, with a little piece of bark for the pillow.

Between them were ashes and pieces of burnt wood, showing that a fire had been made.

Of all the curious countries through which we passed on that memorable journey, the country of the dwarfs must take the palm.

Repeatedly were we attacked by them during that night and the next, but we never succeeded in coming up with a solitary dwarf, or of obtaining a nearer view of one than upon the occasion just described.

On the third day we seemed to have passed beyond the range of their villages, of which we encountered not a few, and found ourselves at nightfall entering upon a broad prairie, with the great black mountain looming up before us at no great distance away.

Here we encamped, and having eaten a hearty supper Gus and I remained smoking and talking and watching the stars long after the O'Gilligan had fallen asleep.

"We are getting on, profess, we are certainly getting on," remarked my boy, knocking the ashes out of his fourth pipe and showing signs of sleepiness at last. "If apparent distance goes for anything we ought to be at the foot of the black mountain by to-morrow night. What do you say?"

"It certainly has that appearance," I replied, "and as the mountain presents anything but an inviting look, I move that we turn in, for we shall certainly need all our strength before we reach the top."

"That's agreed to," he replied in his merry way; "but what do you suppose makes it look so black?"

"Oh, the color of the rocks—it can't be anything else."

"There can't be much soil there, that's one thing, and—hist! hist! There is some one coming! Heavens and earth, look there!"

He had turned abruptly and was looking behind him.

I, who had likewise heard the noise which startled him, did the same, and by the light of the dying fire saw a great

number of people emerging from the forest, marching in regular order and armed with spears and shields.

They were close upon us, their footfalls giving back but slight sound from the grassy sward.

Judge of my astonishment when I perceived by the light of the fire that this was an army of women—not men!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE COUNTRY OF THE AMAZONS.

An army of women!

That was what I saw!

My boy Gus saw it, too, and clutching me by the arm drew me back under the shadow of the great ceiba tree, beneath which we had been enjoying our evening smoke.

"Profess, they are women!"

"I know it. Have you forgotten what Katunga said? 'Beyond the land of the dwarfs there is the land of women.' Those were his words.

"I laughed at him at the time, now I begin to believe he was right."

"You'll get so you'll believe anything soon, profess. Look at them. Upon my soul they are a regular band of Amazons. What with the background of the forest and the moon doing her best to make things light from above, one would almost imagine that we were looking at some sort of Black Crook business in old Niblo's at home in New York."

"Would that we were," I murmured. "Gus, my boy, I'm afraid we're in a bad box. Do not forget that Katunga also told us that these Amazons were fierce creatures and always at war. Suppose they should take a notion to war on us?"

"Bah! who's afraid? You're always borrowing trouble. Trust me. I pride myself on being a ladies' man, you know. Show me the woman who can get the best of me. We shall get out of this scrape just as we have got out of a dozen others. But see, they'll be here in no time. Shall I wake up O'Gilligan, profess?"

"I beg you won't. I don't want him howling around. Everything depends upon our tact. Women or not, these Amazons may make short work of us unless we are shrewd."

Gus was right.

The Amazons were now close upon us.

There was no use to even think of beating a retreat.

On one side of us lay the forest, but it was so open and free from undergrowth that they would have had no difficulty in tracking us if they were so disposed.

To fly across the plain would have been simple folly, since in the bright moonlight we would have remained visible for miles.

Besides, it had ever been our policy to face danger rather than to flee from it, and to this policy we owed it that we had succeeded in penetrating this strange country thus far.

Now they were so near that we could hear the sound of their footfalls—that we could distinguish outlines of faces and forms.

Women they certainly were, with not a man among them, and they marched in regular platoons like well-drilled soldiers, four abreast.

Their dress was a simple loose garment of a bluish color (this I learned later, of course), and all of one piece, reaching downward to the knees, and gathered in by a belt about the waist.

On their heads they wore helmet-shaped hats of some sort of grass cloth, and each carried her shield and spear.

As to their number I can only guess, since I did not count them; but to the best of my recollection there must have been five hundred in the band—possibly six.

Long before this they had seen us standing beneath the ceiba tree in the moonlight, and when they came abreast of our encampment a halt was made and Gus and I found ourselves bowing low before the leader, a stern, muscular-looking female, of dusky though unpleasant features, and somewhat above the medium height.

Could they speak Arabic?

Were they to be friends or foes?

With beating heart I addressed the leader in that ancient tongue.

To my intense relief she replied in the same language, demanding our nationality, our business and our names.

Never shall I forget the look of amazement which overspread her face when my answer was made.

"You seek the city of Tedla?"

"Madam, we do."

"You are alone?"

"Alone with our servant, who sleeps in yonder tent."

"You know the danger before you?"

"Madam, we fear not danger."

"Yet you are men."

I understood this answer later on.

For a brief space the strange creature continued to question me, her followers standing motionless meanwhile.

Certainly better discipline I never saw, though I must admit that I detected more than one among the Amazons casting sheep's eyes at the handsome form of my boy.

Now this was one of the strangest incidents of all the long train of strange adventures through which we passed.

Its outcome was equally strange.

I have neither time nor space to dwell upon it in detail, lest my narrative be extended beyond its proper bounds.

Suffice to say that the leader of the Amazons informed us that we were to prepare to instantly join them and march to the city of their queen without delay.

What disposition was there to be made of us remained to be seen.

When we woke up Terrence O'Gilligan there was a terrible splutter.

"Howly murther! Luk at the women!" he cried. "It's not mesilf that will trust mesilf in their hands at all, at all."

It took some moments to reason with the ridiculous fellow, but I brought him to his senses at last, and having packed our traps, surrounded by a bodyguard of Amazons, we moved away across the plain.

Since from the moment of starting no one spoke to us, we, of course, spoke to no one.

Certainly, in one particular at least, these women differed from all others in the world—they maintained a silence most profound.

Whither were they conducting us?

What was to be our fate when our journey's end was reached?

Of course, these were questions which we could not answer.

From the muscular female who marched in advance with the tread of a drum-major, we knew that this strange tribe were called the Quorra.

Whether or no there existed any men among them we remained in ignorance until our destination was reached at last.

This event, long looked forward to, occurred shortly before noon the following day.

We had almost gained the end of the great plain, and the black mountain towered above us fierce and grim, when I perceived directly ahead a considerable collection of curious mud-topped huts rising from the level of the plain.

Soon the "man" question was settled definitely, for out to meet us rushed a host of the masculine gender, some carrying

infants, just as women of other tribes would do, and with crowds of naked children trotting by their sides.

How strange it all seemed!

Here was a people among which the order of nature was completely reversed, where the men did the work of women, and the women played the part of men.

And yet, after all, had not the old Greek historian, Herodotus, described just such a people?

Certainly he had.

And, oh, what a reputation the scientific world has bestowed upon him for lying for his pains!

Yet I saw it, and I aver most solemnly that what I state is the truth.

The town is called Kouka, and must contain several thousand inhabitants. Among every family that strange social state, which keeps the men at home to cook and tend the children and sends the feminine portion of the community off to the battlefield, invariably prevails.

Among the surrounding tribes the Quorra women are greatly feared, being fierce and war-like.

As for their treatment of us, I am sure I have no reason to complain.

We were given a hut to ourselves in the centre of the town close to a large structure, which we were informed was the residence of the queen.

Everything which they could do for our comfort was done. Two men and any number of boys were always in readiness to attend to our wants.

They were curious, mild-mannered creatures, presenting in every way a marked contrast to the women, who as nearly as we could find out never did any work at all.

Not that day nor the next did we receive audience with the queen.

When we suggested that we desired to continue our journey we were told that it was impossible until the queen had given her consent.

It came at last on the third day.

Late in the afternoon a company of women presented themselves and marched us to the "palace," informing us briefly that the queen demanded our presence at once.

Shall I ever forget that interview?

Indeed, I fancy not.

Surrounded by her bodyguard of women she sat upon a raised platform of earth, clothed in a blue robe in texture resembling silk.

Possibly she had once been a handsome woman, though age had now crept upon her, and the fact of her long hair being dyed sky-blue gave her a most peculiar appearance which can be better imagined than described.

At her side sat or rather crouched two of the most beautiful creatures it has ever been my fortune to behold.

Dusky skin—not black or even approaching it, but more after the style of complexion of the Moorish beauties—dark, melting eyes, and a wealth of coal-black hair, and as to age the eldest could not yet have passed her twentieth year.

"Profess, did you ever in your life see a being so beautiful?" whispered Gus, his eyes fixed upon the eldest.

"Hush!" I breathed. "For heaven's sake be careful! Remember that one word, one admiring glance even may bring us to our death."

As we bowed low before the queen a burst of strange, weird music resounded through the hut.

When we raised our heads again it had ceased, and we found that the Queen of the Quorra had arisen and stood regarding us curiously; "taking us in," as Gus put it, "from head to foot."

Then she spoke.

Her voice was harsh and discordant.

"Oh, strangers, what would ye in the land of the Quorra?" she demanded, speaking in Arabic and in the usual high-flown style.

I stated our business briefly.

We were travelers; we sought to reach the city of Tedla. If our presence in Kouka was in any way disturbing to her majesty we should be only too glad to depart forthwith.

"To visit Tedla means death," she answered, slowly. "Know you not that all men captured by the warriors of the Quorra must, by the law, remain among them as slaves?"

I confessed my ignorance.

What more I might have said I cannot state, since at that moment an interruption occurred which changed the whole aspect of affairs at once.

It was all Gus' fault.

In spite of my warning he would not stop it.

He persisted in throwing looks of admiration upon the eldest princess, and all of a sudden that young lady sprang from the raised platform, threw both arms about the neck of my boy and kissed him thrice upon the cheek.

I saw the Queen of the Quorra turn almost pale.

If I had not heard the shrill cries which went up from among the assembled Amazons I must have been deaf indeed.

Then, before I had time to think of what was coming next, I was seized by the women and dragged back to the hut.

Day succeeded day.

Terrence O'Gilligan and I were kept close prisoners.

My boy I had neither seen nor heard of by so much as a word.

This drove me almost insane.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ESCAPE FROM THE QUORRA.

Where was Gus?

Had they killed him?

This was the ever present thought.

With a constant guard of twenty fierce females surrounding the hut, what could I do?

The slightest effort on my part to communicate with them was received with fixed spears.

A second movement and they would have run me through beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Even the men who attended us, voluble enough before, were silent now, and refused to reply to any remark I ventured to make.

It was during these dark days that I grew to admire the character of Terrence O'Gilligan.

He was always hopeful, always looking upon the bright side.

While all went serenely Terrence was a perpetual growler.

Now that evil times had come upon us, he was directly the reverse.

"Cheer up, Misther Inchbald, "I can hear him say even now at this distant date. "Sure they'd niver harm him. The lady was smitten with him, an' who can wonder? Faix, no purtier man than Misther Gus was iver seen by good Christian eyes, let alone the likes of these black haythens as they are."

Sometimes I thought to fight my way out of the hut, and gain an audience with the queen at all hazards.

But then there would have been no use?

Such action might only serve to bring about the worst.

If they had killed Gus, or proposed to kill him, why had they not killed O'Gilligan and my wretched self also?

Why did they still continue to feed us?

How was it that not even the smallest article among our goods had been disturbed?

It was long after sundown on the evening of the eighth day, while I was sitting upon the mud floor abstracting such slight solace as I could from my pipe, and asking myself these same questions for the hundredth, yes, the thousandth time, that the grass mat which guarded the entrance was softly raised and a woman stood before me in the hut.

It was the Queen of the Quorra.

The queen and no one else.

I was upon my feet in an instant, dropped my pipe, and bent before her with beating heart.

"Is he your son, oh, stranger?" she asked slowly, her eyes fixed upon mine.

"He is, oh, queen."

May God forgive the lie—there is no help for it.

"And she is my daughter. It is she who will rule over the Quorra when I am dead and gone. Oh, the black day that brought you here—the black day—the black day!"

"Madame," I answered, my voice trembling with suppressed emotion, "answer me one question—does my son still live?"

She started.

"Live—live! Of course he lives. I wish he did not. I would slay him, and you, too, if I dared."

The ferocity of her countenance was terrible.

Yet, though it horrified me, her words brought to my soul an overpowering sense of relief.

Gus still lived.

It was enough.

If my boy could but be saved then should she deal with me as she pleased.

"Pardon him, oh, queen! He is but a youth," I began, when, with an imperious gesture, she broke in upon my speech.

"You mistake, oh, stranger!" she said quickly. "You know not the laws of the Quorra. Listen and know them now. Men with us are as women with your people—with all other people on the earth. This man, your son, is as nothing to me, but to my willful daughter he must become a husband if something is not done to prevent it."

"Let us go on our journey," I cried. "Give me back my son, and let us depart at once. Never shall you see our faces again."

"Oh, stranger, you have spoken. Just this I propose to do, but I do it on the risk of my life. Know that with the Quorra the woman's will is law. When once a woman expresses a preference for a man, as my daughter expressed preference for your son, then by the law must he marry her within a month. If any person, no matter whom it is, seeks to prevent this, the Quorra women tear her heart out and throw her to the dogs."

"Cannot you prevent it, oh, queen?"

"Not even I. Yet this I propose to do and run the risk. Your son is of an alien race, a believer in a strange religion.

"The power a marriage with my daughter would confer upon him among the men of this tribe would overturn every institution we possess. Nevertheless, my people demand it—they are preparing for the marriage even now."

"And your purpose, oh, queen?"

"To brave the fury of the women of the Quorra and secretly remove your son to-night. Think not that I do this out of any consideration for you or for him, for I do not.

"If I dared I would kill you all, but in the great book of the prophet Zeg-zeg is written that there will come a time when white men shall visit Kouka and the women shall slay them; and that on that day shall the heavens fall."

Now I had heard of hosts and hosts of prophets in my day, but never of the immortal Zeg-zeg, yet in my heart I blessed him for his prophesying as he did.

So great was my curiosity, however, concerning this sacred book of the Quorra that I would have questioned the queen further, but she would not permit it.

"Prepare to start instantly, oh, stranger," she said hurriedly. "Order your servant to collect all that belongs to you. In an hour's time you must set out for the base of the black mountain, and be on your way to Tedla, or, defying every calamity, my order goes forth to slay your son."

"But Gus—my boy—what of him?" I eagerly demanded.

"You will meet him where my people leave you," she answered, moving toward the door of the hut. "Speak no word to anyone. Obey and your son shall be restored to you. I leave you both to the tender mercies of the queen who is never seen. Now farewell."

She was gone.

Gone, and O'Gilligan and I were alone.

I was deeply perplexed.

Not only did I dread even the thought of leaving the city of these dreadful women without my boy—and what assurance had I that I should meet him as promised?—but the parting words of the Queen of the Quorra were still burning in my brain.

"I leave you to the tender mercies of the queen who is never seen."

Those were the words.

And their meaning?

I could only guess at it.

Why was it that, though many travelers seemed to have sought that mysterious city before us, none had ever returned?

What strange power did this queen whom none could see wield over the fortunes of men?

Ah! I was destined soon to learn and carry the recollection of my discovery ever present in my mind to the end of my days.

I communicated the nature of my interview with the Queen to Terrence O'Gilligan.

He, the simple fellow, believed the promise given, and began to prepare for a start at once.

I was still doubting, still hesitating, almost insane with varying thoughts, when into the hut burst the muscular female who had captured us on the edge of the forest, and ordered us to follow her forthwith.

There was no gainsaying such instructions, particularly as I soon discovered that she had a force of fifty Quorra women behind her to back it up.

Between these fierce Amazons O'Gilligan and I were marched out of the town and across the plains for a distance of perhaps five miles or so, until the very foot of the great black mountain, at which I had stared so often, was gained.

"Your way lies yonder, oh, stranger," said the Amazon, waving her spear toward the mountain. "Take it, and trouble the women of the Quorra no more. You can see the city of Tedla from the topmost peak."

Before I could reply she had given her followers the command to move, and O'Gilligan and I stood listening to the sounds of their retreating footsteps as into the darkness they marched away.

I had been gazing eagerly about me, but saw nothing of Gus.

Now there came from behind the great black bowlder against which I leaned the sound of someone moving upon the sandy surface.

Thinking it only Terrence O'Gilligan, I did not move.

I was lost in anxious thought—my head buried in my hands.

"Profess! You dear old profess! Have you no welcome for your boy!"

I was aroused from my reverie in an instant.

It could not be!

But yes, it was.

There before me stood Gus, his eyes meeting mine with all their old merry twinkle.

The next moment and we were locked in each other's arms.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"WHERE MEN ARE STONES AND STONES ARE MEN."

"Where?"

"There!"

"I see nothing but the desert, nothing but sand stretching off to the south as far as the eye can reach."

"But you are not looking in the right direction. Why will you persist in turning your head the way you do? There, so—now do you see it? Ha! O'Gilligan, you have gained the top at last? Look, man, look! There lies the city we seek beneath our very feet.

It was my boy, Gus, who spoke, seizing my head between both hands as he did so, and half-playfully, half-vexed, turning it from the direction in which I had persisted in looking, and forcing my gaze down into the valley below.

Then I saw it.

And I marveled at my stupidity in not seeing it before.

"Is it Tedla, think you, Profess?" whispered Gus, in awe-stricken tones.

"Is it the city of the invisible Quane?" questioned Terrence O'Gilligan in the same breath.

"It must be—it is!" I rejoined. "That masculine female, the captain of the Quorra Light Guard, who escorted us to the black mountain, said that we should see Tedla from the topmost peak—O'Gilligan, you remember—she was right, and there it is.

"Faix, an' I do, Misther Inchbald. Wurra, wurra! What a woman she was! It's mesilf that wud be afther liking her for a wife—snow in December is no surer nor that."

I made no reply.

Neither did Gus.

We stood side by side gazing downward—I even doubt if my boy heard O'Gilligan's remark at all.

We had started from the point at the foot of the black mountain where I had encountered Gus before daybreak, and now it was high noon.

Gus' story?

It was a brief one.

From the moment when dragged from the presence of the Queen of the Quorra, after the princess threw her arms about his neck and kissed him, they had left my boy confined in a hut and closedly guarded.

Not ill-treated, though.

Quite the contrary.

They had forced Quorra dainties upon him until his stomach loathed the sight of food of any sort.

They had dressed him in a silken robe, hung gold chains about his neck, put golden bracelets upon his ankles and wrists.

There he remained, his every movement constantly watched, his every want forestalled by those poor creatures—the Quorra men servants—while day and night a band of native musicians discoursed excruciating music outside the hut.

Such had been his condition until after partaking of a cup of milk just at dusk on the previous evening his senses left him.

When next he regained consciousness he lay dressed in his usual garments behind the great rock at the foot of the black mountain.

I was leaning against the rock—he saw me, and gaining his feet came toward me, as has been said.

How came he there?

That we never knew.

"They were fattening me like some prize pig," Gus had remarked in relating his story after hearing mine. "I'm sure I'm much obliged to them for dispensing with the slaughter, but at least they might have left me the golden bracelets and chains, since I was to be deprived of a princess who should have been mine by right of Quorra law."

As for myself, I could only return grateful thanks that we had escaped from those dreadful women as we had.

Then came our journey up the black mountain.

The ascent had been a most trying one.

The mountain was absolutely treeless, and composed wholly of obsidian, a smooth, black stone resembling glass.

We could never have accomplished it in the world but for a fortunate discovery on the part of Terrence O'Gilligan.

This was a series of rude steps, chipped upon the shiny surface of the mountain extending from the bottom to the top.

Who had cut them, and when?

Long ago we had ceased to wonder at these ever-recurring evidences of a powerful race of people who must have inhabited this strange land in times long passed.

We had made use of the steps, and had gained the mountain top.

Now beneath our feet lay the goal for which we had endured so much to reach—Tedla, the mysterious, the city of the queen who is never seen!

Long and earnestly we gazed upon it.

It was a city of vast extent.

At the very edge of a seemingly boundless stretch of deser country it lay spread out before our astonished gaze.

Temples and palaces, towers and columns, the hovels of the poor, the great homes of the rich.

Never before had I beheld a sight so marvelous.

Familiar as I was with the architecture of ancient nations I could perceive even from our present height that we were gazing upon the capital of some long-forgotten race.

Were the buildings then in ruins?

Not one of them so far as we could see.

Yet over all a strange stillness seemed to prevail.

By the aid of my powerful fieldglass I could see human forms by the thousands.

They filled the streets, the public squares.

Some stood erect, others lay prostrate on the ground.

Though we watched them through the glass for a full hour at least we never saw one of them move in the slightest degree.

What could it mean?

Then again what signified the dazzling whiteness whic seemed to cover everything in and about the city like a shroud

The buildings were as white as snow, the people wore whit garments, one and all; even the pavement in the street presented the same appearance, contrasting strangely with th higher slopes of the black mountain.

I thus qualify my statement for the reason that we soon discovered that the mountainside was to the height of severa hundred feet as white as the city itself.

"Gus," said I at last, in awe-stricken tones, "it is my belie that we are gazing upon a city of the dead."

"Where men are stones and stones are men," repeated my boy, slowly, quoting from the writing. "Profess, we hav gone too far to turn back now; let us descend and see fo ourselves."

And we did it.

Down the steps—they were continued on the other side o the mountain—we went forthwith.

I moved in advance, and as a matter of course kept m eyes about me, fixed ever upon the whitened rock.

By and by we reached it.

Now we could see the streets of Tedla so plainly in th clear atmosphere that it seemed as though we had but t extend our hand and touch the people where they stoo and lay.

And the same death-like stillness pervaded everything

Beneath us were men, women and children by the thousand. Since our first observation not one of all the vast number had moved from their positions. Not a sound had reached our ears.

It was as though we were gazing upon some vast cemetery, filled with massive structures, with marble statues.

Again I repeated:

"It is a city of the dead."

"Profess, can you account for it?" questioned Gus, quietly.

As for O'Gilligan, he was so overcome with the strange scene that for some time he had not uttered a word.

"No more than yourself, Gus. One thing is certain, every one of those people whom we see down there must have been long since deprived of life."

"By what means?"

"Heaven only knows; but see, we are close upon the whitened rock now. It lies but a few steps below us; this turn will bring us to it. Now then, O'Gilligan, what's the matter with you?"

"Luk! Luk, Misther Inchbald. Luk at the corpses! Oh, murther! murther! but there's been great slaughter done here!"

We did not stop to look, we ran—ran down the steps with all our speed.

What Terrence O'Gilligan saw we both saw the instant his extended forefinger directed our attention toward it.

But for a short distance were the steps hidden from our view by their sudden bend about an overhanging projection in the rock.

Beyond the projection they became visible again, and there, lying prostrate upon them, in every possible position, were men, women and children by dozens, all covered with a whitish substance that looked like the driven snow.

When at last we gained the spot, put forth our hands and touched them, we had still another confirmation of the writing in the ebony casket.

It was not snow nor flesh and blood upon which our hands rested, but stone.

Cold, whitened, solid stone!

CHAPTER XIX.

A CITY OF DEATH.

Never in the whole course of my existence have I experienced such strange sensations as were mine when first my hand came in contact with that stony mass which had once been flesh and blood.

It was the body of a young and powerful man, clothed in what had once been a loose tunic or gown, belted in at the waist, much after the fashion which prevailed in Rome twenty centuries ago.

The body lay face downward upon the steps, the hands stretched above the head just as it had fallen when the death shock came.

But what was that death shock?

This was a question hard to answer.

That the solution of the mystery lay concealed in the whitish substance which covered this body, as well as the dozens which lay further down the steps—yes, and in the city itself—we felt instinctively must be true.

Long and earnestly I examined into the mystery.

The body was perfectly petrified, every outline of limb, every feature, even the tunic which covered it had been turned to solid stone.

When we tried to raise it we discovered that we were attempting the impossible.

It seemed to have become welded to the steps—almost a part of the mountain itself.

So also with all the other bodies, with the rocky walls of the mountain, with the steps.

Everything about us was completely covered with a whitish substance closely resembling polished quartz, lying layer upon layer.

Long before this we had discovered a singular circumstance.

It was that the great size of the bodies—they were enormously stout—was due to repeated applications of the white substance, and yet with such perfect evenness had it been applied that every feature had been carefully preserved.

Had it descended in the form of rain?

I thought so, and said as much to Gus.

Was this the secret of the mysterious city—the reason why no one entering it ever returned?

I saw Gus look nervously heavenward.

He gazed upon a cloudless sky.

"I'll go no furder," said Terrence O'Gilligan, who was trembling like a leaf. "Sure, a city where men are turned to stone is no place for the likes of me."

"Yes, you will!" I cried, seizing him by the shoulders and pushing him on ahead. "We are all in the same boat, O'Gilligan; only the coward falters now."

"Where men are stones and stones are men, and people stand on the earth for ten thousand years," murmured Gus, as we picked our way over the petrified bodies which crowded the steps. "When do you calculate all this happened, profess?"

"More than two thousand years ago, certainly, since St. Cyprian visited this city before us. The architecture of yonder buildings is partly Egyptian and partly Assyrian. To say the least, they must be the work of an extremely ancient race."

"You believe the writing now?"

"Implicitly."

"And that we shall behold the queen who is never seen?"

"If no man has seen her how can we hope to, Gus? I confess that part of the writing remains a mystery yet."

A few short hours, and had we but known it, that mystery of mysteries was destined to be explained.

For what we said I have neither time nor space to speak.

Nor can I fully remember, since we spoke but little as we roamed through Tedla's streets.

Soon we had reached the foot of the descent, and crossing a level space of a mile or more, entered beneath a magnificent archway, beautifully sculptured with figures of men and animals, and bearing innumerable hieroglyphic characters the like of which I had never seen before.

Oh, the stillness! The awful stillness!

It needed not the multitude of stony corpses which lay scattered everywhere over the plain to tell us that we had entered a city of death.

Wretched mortals.

Their efforts to escape had been strangely futile.

Some were standing upright like so many marble statues; more lay prostrate where they had fallen when overtaken by that awful storm.

Scattered in every direction were whitened objects of various sorts; ornaments, little idols, household utensils, articles which might have been clothing, one and all transformed into solid stone.

The crowd just inside the city gate was something fearful.

Reluctantly we were forced to climb over the petrified corpses—there was no other way.

And so we entered Tedla, roamed through houses, temples, palaces, wandered about its streets crowded with those stony forms.

There were trees, mostly the olive and palm, now whitened stone like all the rest.

There were men in all positions and attitudes; some in the act of drawing objects from out of the houses, some holding bread, clothing, jewels and other articles—hundreds with little children folded in their arms.

There were women giving infants nourishment, others with their arms filled with household stuffs, which they had vainly hoped to convey to a place of safety.

In one place—it was in front of a particularly elegant house—lay a distinguished-looking man of great age upon a gorgeous bed of stone, with guards standing beside him armed with pikes and spears.

Who was he?

Prince, potentate or priest?

Whoever he may have been he had shared the common fate.

Animals crowded the streets by the thousands, camels, oxen, asses, horses, sheep and birds, all of the same hard, dazzling white.

Some of the figures lacked hands, arms, legs, and in many instances even heads; broken off by what agency it was impossible to divine.

At several points also masses of petrified coins were found, bearing strange characters on one side, on the other a very accurate representation of a horse's head.

Within the buildings all was different.

Here was dust and ashes. The walls and every portable object bearing evidence of immense age and great decay.

Had it been possible to remove it we could have collected cartloads of treasure, since golden ornaments were scattered in every direction.

As it was, Terrence O'Gilligan collected a great bag full of what I at first took to be nothing but white pebbles, but which proved to be precious stones, diamonds, rubies, sapphires, emeralds, and even the rare beryl, later on; besides, both Gus and myself gathered many curious objects in the shape of jewelry and the aforementioned golden ornaments, more, in fact, than we could possibly carry away.

Thus far we had penetrated street after street, passing along each for a short distance and then returning to the main thoroughfare, which unquestionably led to the centre of the city.

So interested had we become in our explorations and the examination of the various temples and palaces, that not until now did we perceive that the shades of night were creeping upon us fast.

"Are you going to spend the night here, profess?" inquired Gus, as we emerged from a particularly magnificent temple where I had spent much time in the examination of the hieroglyphics and the highly colored paintings on the walls.

"I see no reason why we should not," I answered. "As to the dangers of the place, where are they? Stone men cannot kill."

"True; but the same calamity which overtook these people may fall upon us."

"I'll risk that. Now that I am here I do not propose to abandon these wonders hastily. Besides, there is the queen—we haven't found her yet, and the original manuscripts of the Bible placed at her feet by St. Cyprian. You have not forgotten them?"

"By no means. Still we can do nothing in the darkness. See, we are almost at the end of this street. Let us push on toward that great square at which it terminates. We have still half an hour of daylight, and must improve it in looking up a place to pitch our tent."

We advanced rapidly, and in a moment had gained the square.

It was surrounded by lofty and magnificent structures, and in its centre rose a mighty column, its capital surmounted by a giant winged globe very much after the Egyptian style.

Long before this we had become accustomed to the petrified people and pushed by them without even bestowing upon their whitened features a single glance.

It was well that this was so, for in this square the wretched inhabitants of Tedla had gathered in countless thousands, only to encounter the same terrible fate as their neighbors and friends who had sought refuge outside the city gates.

Therefore, when Gus suddenly paused before the stony figure of a man who stood upright, facing us with outstretched hands, I paid no attention until aroused by his startled cry.

I turned abruptly.

"Profess! Oh, pitying heaven, look at this!"

It was a cry of mental agony such as I had never heard escape the lips of my boy before.

Nor could I wonder at it.

The petrified person upon whom my gaze now rested was unlike all others yet encountered.

It was a man in European dress.

A man whose whitened face, seen in the dimming light of the descending sun, was the veritable counterpart of the face of my boy.

There he stood as though frozen to the pavement of the square—stood, as I have stated, with one arm outstretched, and upon his features a look of mortal terror painful to behold.

"Profess—you see?"

"I see, my boy; I see."

"It is my father. There can be no doubt of it."

"Your father or one of his many ancestors, who, like himself, have sacrificed their lives to the strange quest which brings us to this awful place."

"No, it is my father," he replied, slowly. "I have studied his photograph too often to be mistaken. Great heaven, but this is terrible! Oh, profess, profess, what shall I do?"

"You will come away with me for the present," I replied. "Come away until we have had time to collect ourselves—to think."

"And leave my father?"

"You must leave him. What can you do? He is dead—long since dead. A marble statue fresh from the chisel of the most famous sculptor on earth could not be more perfect. And do you know," I added in an understone, that my words might escape the awe-stricken O'Gilligan, "do you know, Gus, that I have reconsidered my intention of remaining over night in Tedla, lest the same fate which has fallen upon your father may fall on us."

We were moving toward the steps of a magnificent palace now, a building surpassing all others we had seen in ornamentation and size.

I had my boy by the arm, and was talking calmly to him, when all at once—it was just as we had reached the steps of the palace—he gave a great start and tore himself free.

"The queen, profess!—the queen!"

"What?" I fairly shouted.

"The queen! See! Look there at the top of the steps!"

And I looked.

At the top of the steps, facing the square, stood the figure of a woman dressed in a long robe of snowy whiteness, of course.

Upon her head rested a whitened crown.

The right hand grasped a scepter, while with the left she seemed to be in the very act of removing a veil from her face when the death stroke came.

And in this she had so far succeeded as to disclose to our astonished vision the most dazzlingly beautiful features ever beheld by mortal man.

It was the face of the miniature.

It was the mysterious ruler of the mysterious dead who surrounded us.

It was the "Queen who is never seen."

CHAPTER XX.

FOUND AT THE FEET OF THE QUEEN.

"The queen who is never seen, profess!—the queen herself, at last! Ye gods, what a beautiful face! Why, the miniature is nowhere! Look! See how naturally she stands there! She seems to beckon to me. It seems almost as though she lived!"

I turned from the contemplation of the petrified queen to my boy Gus.

What ailed him?

His eyes were fixed on the statue with a strange look in them—such a look as I had seen in a bird when fascinated by a snake.

Had he forgotten his father?

It could hardly be possible, since there right behind us stood the stony corpse of the elder Welby, his raised right hand pointing toward the mystic queen, as though in awful warning to his son.

Then, as I saw Gus glide up the steps toward the statue, a most singular sensation came over me.

In spite of the fascination of these features—and I felt it, too—there was a sense of impending calamity.

"Get out of the city! Get out of the city or death awaits you!" the marble lips of Gus' father seemed to mutter, and at the precise instant, when the impression was the strongest, there came a strange, rumbling noise overhead.

I directed my gaze upward.

While a moment before the heavens had been perfectly clear, now two dense clouds of a peculiar whitish appearance could be seen rising above the buildings on either side of the square.

I don't know how to express the horror which seized me.

Like a flash it came over my mind that the petrification and death of these people could be due to nothing less than some strong alkaline substance of the nature of lime or silica, taken up from the desert by evaporation and afterward rained down by some unexplained process from the clouds; and this theory, be it stated, remains fixed in my mind to this day.

Now, I repeat, all these thoughts came over me like a flash.

I had seen the clouds and formed my opinion before Gus had reached the foot of the steps.

"Come on, profess! Come on!" he shouted. "Why do you hang back?"

The spell which had seized me was broken.

I sprang after Gus with O'Gilligan, who had been watching me curiously, close at my heels.

"We must leave this place instantly!" I cried. "There is death in the very air."

"But my father—I cannot go until I have performed the last sad duty of giving to his remains a Christian burial. You understand, profess, that we must wait for that. Then there is the queen and the manuscripts, and——"

"And your father's fate for us, if we waste time in talking!"

Then catching him by the arm I pointed out the clouds and told my theory.

"Gus, we cannot wait, we must not wait. We must be above the white line on the mountainside before those clouds are overhead."

"Perhaps you are right," he answered, gazing skyward, doubtfully. "Still, I have not come thus far to retreat without even searching for the manuscripts—at least I shall make the attempt."

"Then for the love of heaven make it quick!" I cried, following him as he dashed up the steps of the palace. "Good for it, delay means death."

Lest Terrence O'Gilligan should take alarm at our leaving him, we became unmanageable I had spoken in Arabic, Gus replying in the same tongue.

It was without the faintest suspicion of what had passed between us, therefore, that the faithful fellow followed us up the palace steps.

Once the top was gained, even I stood spellbound, entranced with the beauty of that marble face.

That I gazed upon the original of the features depicted upon the ivory tablet I could not for an instant doubt.

There she stood directly in front of the main entrance to the palace, her right hand, which grasped the scepter, extended toward the square, as if to impress upon her petrified subjects assurance of protection, the left in the act of removing the veil from her face.

If words fail me in the attempt to describe the beauty of those features as shown in the miniature, how can I be expected to describe them now?

It is impossible—simply impossible.

I can only reiterate that no such beauty can by any possibility have ever been seen by mortal eyes.

And this woman had actually lived!

Lived, and had died the death which struck her subjects down.

But when?

If St. Cyprian told the truth—and could we now doubt him?—two thousand years was but a fraction of the time her petrified form had maintained its position facing the silent multitude which thronged the public square.

It is my belief that in common with many Eastern potentates, the Queen of Tedla had kept her features studiously concealed from her subjects.

That at the moment when the awful calamity had overtaken the city she had emerged from the palace in her royal robes, trusting that the sight of those veiled features might bring reassurance to the terrified multitude, only to meet death in common with the rest.

I stretched forth my hand and touched her.

A strange thrill seemed to shoot through my frame as my fingers encountered only cold stone.

"The manuscripts!" I cried. "The manuscripts, Gus! Look at the clouds; they are rising higher each moment, and—ah! I was right!"

To my unspeakable horror there was a lightning flash, and I could see masses of white drops descending from the cloud toward which my gaze was turned.

"The manuscripts must be here!" replied my boy, with all the calmness he could assume, for what I saw he saw as well.

Then he bent at the feet of the queen and with all his strength grasped a ring of whitened metal imbedded in the stone pavement at the top of the palace steps.

Even before I had time to express my astonishment at his discovery I beheld the stone to which the ring was attached yield to the herculean strength of my boy.

Slowly it moved upward, disclosing a narrow cavity beneath in which a large box of beaten gold lay concealed.

Gus dropped his hold on the ring and fell back panting.

I seized the golden box and drew it from its long concealment at the feet of the queen.

"Profess, this is the end of an undertaking!"

"My boy, I believe it"

This much and no more passed between us.

Then shouting a warning to the astonished O'Gilligan, we turned our backs upon these beautiful features and together dashed down the palace steps.

By this time the clouds had gained height perceptibly.

They moved toward the city from the east and the west low down on the mountainside.

No sooner had we reached the square than we perceived that the wind was blowing.

Its direction was away from the mountain and toward the vast charnel house through which we sped.

Then came more lightning and thunder again.

"An' phwat's the matter wid yez?" demanded Terrence O'Gilligan, unable to comprehend our excitement. "Sure, now, ye've found the box, ain't yez going to see what's inside of it? An' poor Misther Welby, too. Ye are not going to lave him standing on the earth like some haythen idol, instid of giving him a dacent burial an' a bit of a prayer?"

Hurriedly I explained, pointing to the clouds.

The explanation brought to the lips of our servant a howl of dismay.

"Oh, howly saints! what shall I do?" he yelled, dashing on in advance. "Oh, why did we ever come to this haythen place to be turned into blocks of stone!"

Now as I directed my gaze toward the clouds I perceived that the white drops had ceased to fall.

Still the clouds were moving steadily upward, and I could not entertain a doubt that it was only a question of a short space of time before the death-dealing shower must descend.

"My father, my poor father! Must we leave him so?" breathed Gus, hollowly, as we sped along. "Oh, profess, how can I ever pass him? How——"

"Turn your head in the other direction—don't look at him," I whispered. "Remember, my boy, that your life is precious to me—that you have accomplished your father's last commands."

He obeyed me, but I heard him sobbing.

Warningly the hand of the elder Welby seemed to extend itself toward us as we flew past the spot where he stood.

We held tight onto the box as we ran.

Our camp outfit we had left at the gate of the city, and we paused only to possess ourselves of absolute necessities as we passed under the great archway at last.

"Now, boys, it is a dash for life!" I shouted. "Once we are above the white line on the mountainside we are safe. Run! Run as you never ran before! Run as you value your lives!"

And we ran.

Past great heaps of petrified bodies, past the stony remains of horses, camels and oxen, over the whitened surface of that awful plain.

By the time we had reached the foot of the steps leading up the mountains the westerly cloud had overshadowed the city of Tedla, and the whitish drops were falling again.

It was the easterly cloud which we had to fear, for beneath the narrow stretch of sky which still remained visible above us, over which it must pass, lay our course.

It was altogether a most remarkable natural phenomenon.

Two clouds rising from opposite directions, and the wind blowing between them!

But, then, could we now wonder at anything which might take place in this strange land?

Momentarily the darkness was settling down upon us; the wind had increased to a gale.

We flew up the steps like madmen, never heeding the stony bodies of the poor wretches upon whom we trod.

Gus was in advance, O'Gilligan followed, while I brought up the rear.

As we neared the fatal line the clouds above us met and my ears were startled by the ominous patter of rain drops behind us, falling amid the pealing thunder, the blinding lightning flash.

This was just as Gus sprang past the body which we had first discovered, and crossed the white line with a resounding shout.

"Hurrah! hurrah! We are saved!"

Saved, yes; but like Lot's wife in the Scriptures, I turned my head to look behind me.

I must needs look upon Tedla once again.

At the same instant the very flood gates of the heavens seemed to open and rain as white as snow descended upon the city of Tedla and upon that part of the mountain slope beneath the whitened line.

As though divided by a knife, there it stopped.

Not a drop fell beyond the line, but as Terrence O'Gilligan crossed it a gust of wind blew a little spray in such a manner that it touched his nose and the right side of his face.

I, who had turned to look behind me, caught it on the left.

It struck my arm, drenching my coat-sleeve, met my left breast, my cheek, my ear—fortunately, most fortunately, my eye escaped.

It felt as cold as the coldest ice water, and yet, as it seemed to be but a liquid, I allowed myself to hope, and we hurried on up the steps.

Gus got none of it, and for this I thank a merciful Providence, for within ten minutes from the time the spray struck us, the right side of Terrence O'Gilligan's face, my left arm and side, my cheek, my ear, were transformed into white, solid stone.

CHAPTER XXI.

CONCLUSION.

I laid the last sheet of the professor's manuscript down upon the table and raised my eyes.

It is I, Richard R. Montgomery, who is speaking now.

To my surprise I saw that the gray light of dawn was struggling to obtain entrance through the window behind me.

I arose, opened the inside blinds and pereceived that day was about to break.

So interested—nay, entranced—had I been during the perusal of this remarkable narrative that I had never heeded the lapse of time at all.

Nor for the instant did my thoughts revert to my strange patient until I heard his voice behind me pronounce my name.

"Doctor!"

I turned suddenly.

The man was sitting upright in his chair, regarding me curiously, his stone arm supported by its usual rest.

"You have finished my manuscript?"

"I have."

"What do you think of it?"

"Professor Inchbald, no power on earth could make me credit its truth were it not that here before my eyes is its confirmation in the person of yourself."

"And my servant," he replied, shifting himself in the chair, his stony hand striking hard against the wood.

"Your servant! Can it be that he is O'Gilligan?"

His eyes sparkled.

He knew then that I had been interested—knew it by the expression which came over my face—by the intonation of my voice.

"It certainly is O'Gilligan," was his answer. "When he comes in you shall examine his face. Poor fellow, his right eye is gone, which renders his case worse than mine."

"And Gus—what of him?" I questioned.

"Oh, Gus is in Europe just at present. You see, he is in business which sometimes calls him abroad. He did live here with me, but when he married, being so much of a kid, I was afraid his wife——"

"Pardon me," I interrupted, recalled to my professional self by the [illegible] "I forgot that I was the doctor and you my patient. How are you feeling?"

"Better, much better."

I carefully examined him, putting him through the usual tests of breathing.

To my delight my medicines had done their work and all danger passed away.

"I have had a splendid sleep," he said, "and feel as well as I ever can feel again with the burden I carry. I have refused amputation for a long time, doctor, but now, as old age approaches, I fear I shall have to have my arm broken off."

"It would unquestionably relieve you."

"I suppose so; but let us talk of that matter at some other time. My manuscript—will you publish it?"

"Yes, but the end of your narrative?" I asked. "You have left it unfinished. How did you get back? What was in the golden box? Those are the things you have not told."

"You see," he continued, "our journey back to Mahla was really without startling event.

"To tell of our sufferings would only be tedious detail.

"It is enough to know that we finally reached the city of Tripoli in safety, and from thence returned to the United States."

"But," I inquired, "how did you, with your stone arm, manage to ascend the ladders in the pit?"

"I? Oh, Katunga, the Quiloa giant, carried me on his back. Wasn't the fellow glad to see us, though! As for attention, why, those giants almost stuffed us to death. When Katunga finally bade us farewell in sight of the first of the Tripolitan villages—well, I shall never forget that scene."

Then I inquired about the golden box again.

Professor Inchbald, rising with difficulty, moved toward a small safe which stood in one corner of the room, and brought the precious object forth.

When it had been opened he drew forth a number of antique-looking parchment rolls, which I examined one by one.

Of course, I could not read the writing upon the rolls, since Greek is a language I do not understand.

The characters were very minute and beautifully executed, each letter shining like gold.

I gazed upon the sacred relics with a deep sense of awe.

"How is it," I inquired, "that the instructions of St. Cyprian were not carried out? That these precious treasures were not given to the world?"

"Given to the world?" he exclaimed. "Why, the world already has them. You have them yourself—every one has them. Ten cents will purchase a Bible if you have no more."

"Then these rolls are simply the various books of the Bible?"

"I assure you they are nothing else. As for giving these originals to the world, we tried that.

"The British Museum people sneered at my story and pronounced the manuscripts forgeries. The same with the Antiquarian Society of France and the Imperial Museum at Berlin.

"Then I got tired of it and kept them myself, for Gus insisted that I should."

"And your present purpose?"

"Why, some day I may offer them to the Metropolitan Museum here in New York, together with the ivory tablets, which, I regret to say, I cannot show you since they are in the possession of Gus.

"If they reject them—ha! O'Gilligan! What is this, breakfast? Doctor, you will remain, I trust?"

But other duties summoned me, and I withdrew.

Withdrew, wondering at what I had seen, heard and read.

So much for my patient in the mansion behind the brick wall.

Next day I called for the manuscript.

To my disgust I found that Professor Inchbald had reconsidered his determination to publish it.

"People will only laugh at it," he said, "and set me down for the biggest liar in the land."

It took me some years to talk him out of this idea.

At length I succeeded, and, in pursuance with my original intention, gave this story of strange adventure precisely as Professor Inchbald had written it, to the readers of PLUCK AND LUCK.

[THE END.]

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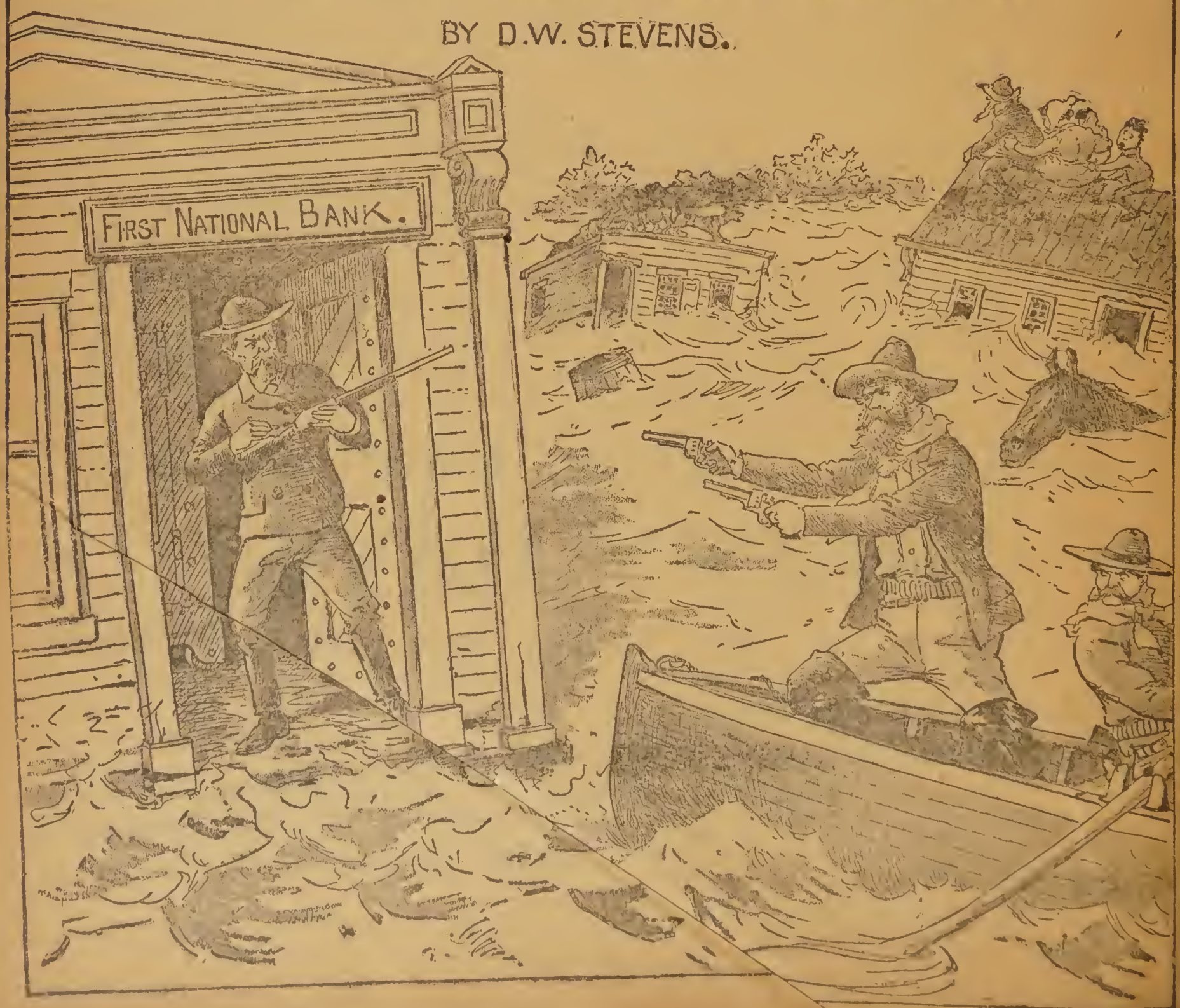

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